RESILIENCE & RESOLVE

Relive the stories that make Mercyhurst, Mercyhurst.
A message from the President

As I write this, students once again fill the Mercyhurst campus. We’re all wearing masks, trying to stay socially distant, and holding lots of classes and meetings in a virtual format. But we’re back.

Our faculty and staff have spent countless hours since the students left in March creating the systems that have allowed us to reopen and give students a real (if very different) Laker experience.

It’s no coincidence that we chose the words “Resilience and Resolve” to describe the way we’ve faced the COVID-19 pandemic. They suggest the kind of perseverance that’s in our DNA and that we’ve displayed over and over during the past 94 years.

In this special issue, we share just a few stories from our history that exemplify those qualities, starting with the determination of Mother Borgia Egan and her Pioneer Sisters to open Mercyhurst College. They’d already overcome a lot of obstacles when a workers’ strike threatened to prevent them from opening on time.

Other stories reveal how Mercyhurst – and a few alumni – have coped with other challenges. And a few stories on the lighter side offer a bit of comic relief. I’ve discovered that Lakers show the same kind of resilience and resolve no matter what goal they’ve set for themselves – even a world record for the longest strudel!

All these stories remind us that our Carpe Diem spirit enables us to push forward toward the goals we’ve set for ourselves, and to cope with challenges that threaten to derail our plans.

One of my predecessors, Sister Carolyn Herrmann, once remarked: “Life on the frontier is unafraid of change. It welcomes it. It helps to bring it about. It adjusts quickly to it. We need imagination at once bold and disciplined, creative minds that will dare to try new ideas, minds able to discern both the fact of novelty and the focus of relevance.”

Sister Carolyn spoke those words in 1964, but she could just as easily have been talking about the Mercyhurst I know today.

Stay well — and Carpe Diem!

Michael T. Victor, J.D., LL.D.
President, Mercyhurst University

Borgia recalls opening amid worker strike

Condensed from Mother Borgia Egan’s account of the founding of Mercyhurst College.

When ground was broken in September 1924, the general thought was that eighteen months would find the buildings completed. An additional six months’ leeway was given to take care of any unforeseen delays. September 1926 was fixed as the date for opening the new school. ...

In the spring of 1926, when the contract called for a finished building, it was evident that at least another six months would be necessary to make the structure ready for occupancy. Even when summer rolled around, there were serious doubts in the minds of experienced builders that the work could be completed in time for an early September opening.

Additional men were called in to rush the work; day and night shifts were employed. Prospects seemed brighter that the opening day announced for September 7 would find all in readiness. But again the unexpected happened. Less than two weeks before the opening date when floors had yet to be sanded and finished, plumbing and lighting fixtures to be installed, labor trouble developed. ...
Accustomed as they were to face dilemmas of insuperable proportions, the Sisters of Mercy called from the various branch houses Sisters who were skilled in handling paint and varnish brushes as well as in putting together furnishings that had come knocked-down, that they might lend a hand to establishing order out of the chaos that the strike had brought to the project. A crew of eager, courageous Nuns appeared on the scene ready to tackle any problem that was within the power of a woman. Fortunately, most of the critical problems were in this class.

Floors had to be sanded, then varnished. This was the most acute need, as it was imperative that the varnish and other preparations used in finishing floors have time to dry before the building was used. In short order, with a little direction from the idle contractors, huge sanding machines manned by the Sisters were working steadily and effectively. Dormitory floors were one by one being treated to coats of varnish and made ready for occupancy. Day and night this valiant band that included every rank from the Mother Superior to the youngest novice persevered at the work until every room in the large dormitory was put in readiness for the incoming students.

There were no elevators in those days, nor were there men around to do the laborious work of carrying the furniture from the present students’ dining room which served as a receiving room to the flights above. As fast as one crew of Sisters put the furniture together, another group carried the heavy pieces to their destination. ...

When the strike was finally settled, there remained the classrooms to be finished and only Friday and Saturday until noon to accomplish this. When at the blow of the whistle, Saturday at noon, the workers in obedience to Union orders laid down their tools, six classroom floors had been sanded and made ready for varnishing. At noon, the Sister workers took up where the men left off, spent the afternoon and far into the night applying the first coat of varnish that would preserve the wood sufficiently until additional coats could be applied.

Wonderful to relate, in spite of predictions to the contrary, the doors of Mercyhurst swung wide on Tuesday, September 7, to receive its first class of students.
Sister Carolyn Herrmann and Mercyhurst’s commitment to racial justice

By Chris Magoc, Ph.D., and Sister Lisa Mary McCartney, RSM, Ph.D.

For many white Americans, the extraordinary movement for racial and economic justice has inspired an unprecedented reckoning with four centuries of violent, systemic racism. It has also evoked memories of America’s most recent and heralded civil rights movement of the 1960s, when many white citizens joined the African American-led struggle for freedom and equality.

The Mercyhurst University community recalls with particular reverence the leadership of Sister Carolyn Herrmann, president of what was then Mercyhurst College. With deep roots in the Catholic Worker movement extending to her graduate study at Notre Dame, Sister Carolyn championed the engagement of the Mercyhurst community on issues of social justice throughout her tenure as president (1963-1972).

Her work on civil rights is exemplified by two occasions, the first of which is reflected in her “Homily,” delivered prior to a “Bible Vigil for Selma,” held March 11, 1965. Four days earlier, John Lewis and dozens of other voting rights activists were savagely beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, in the event enshrined as “Bloody Sunday.” Two days later in a subsequent march, Reverend James Reeb, a U.S. Army veteran and Unitarian minister, was brutally beaten on the streets of Selma. That evening as Rev. Reeb lay dying, Sister Carolyn, along with sociology professor Judith Wieczorek, led 200 students in a prayer vigil that began in the Mercyhurst dining hall. “We are so comfortable, so privileged, so unaware of what it means to suffer insults and indignities,” Sister Carolyn declared with words that ring poignantly true today. So also does her appeal to “unite in prayer and charity to prove our solidarity with our brothers in chains;” and for the redemption of fellow Americans acting “in error.” Led by Sister Carolyn and singing Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” and the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome,” the group marched through Mercyhurst’s iconic gates in solidarity with the struggle in Selma. On March 14, faculty and students joined hundreds of Erie citizens in a 2.5-mile sympathy march in downtown Erie through rain and snow.

Days later, faculty members Michael Cashore and John Lincourt boarded the local NAACP-organized bus of 26 Erie citizens who traveled to Alabama for the final 3-mile leg of the 54-mile march from Selma to Montgomery. Lincourt and Erie reporter Ron Wasielwski were among those who were spat upon as the throng of several thousand marched toward the state capitol in Montgomery, where they heard these immortal words from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: “How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

But the arc does not bend on its own. In April 1968, an uprising at Academy High School revealed longstanding issues of systemic racism in the Erie School District—not the least of which was the fact that just 10 of 1,658 district employees were African American. The Pennsylvania State Education Association sanctioned the district for dragging its feet in addressing issues of discrimination and segregation.

As historian Roy Strausbaugh has recounted, on April 25, 1969, at the direction of Sister Carolyn, Dr. Bill Bryan, Mercyhurst Director of Education, and professor Bob Sturm notified the superintendent that until a serious plan was developed to merit the lifting of PSEA sanctions, Mercyhurst would no longer send its student teachers to Erie city schools. Sister Carolyn, along with trustee Mace Levin and other members of the Mercyhurst community, then joined a demonstration outside the district offices demanding change. Soon thereafter, Dr. Bryan was leading the Urban Coalition Task Force that developed the district’s anti-discrimination plan.

Proud of this legacy, shaken but inspired by the events of 2020, and grounded in the long history of the Sisters of Mercy confronting prejudice and bigotry, Mercyhurst is recommitting itself to the work of advancing a more just society, beginning here in our own community.
Work by artist Jamie Borowicz '82 reflects Mercyhurst's resilience in face of challenges.
New Bus Provides Trusty Transportation

From The Merciad, March 16, 1964

Congratulations, Bonnie McGough! Your bus is here. The Green Stamp committee did not collect enough stamps to pay for the entire bus, but the Student Government voted to use its profits from last year to purchase the back one-third of the bus: seats for three, two wheels and motor.

On March 3, Dailey Chevrolet brought to campus, not a Volkswagen, but a Corvair Greenbrier sportwagon. The shiny aqua-and-white bus seats 11 people comfortably and has room to seat three more people almost comfortably. It sports white-wall tires, two outside rear-view mirrors, and automatic shift, and soon will be lettered “Mercyhurst College.”

The first expedition in the bus, a trip to Rochester for the NFCC’s meeting, proved unsuccessful, but a check-up at the Dailey clinic cured its spring fever.

Student Government reports reveal just how hard the students worked to accumulate Green Stamps to purchase that much-wanted vehicle:

- S&H Green Stamps are being saved to purchase a Volkswagen bus to be used for individual as well as group transportation. To date, 1,375 books are needed and only one-fourth of the required stamps have been accumulated. The drive will be renewed with “vigah”!

- Pepsi and Teem bottle caps are being collected here at school and from various Erie establishments to help buy S&H Green Stamps and to pay the exchange price on other stamps. Receiving $.01 per two bottle caps, $18 has been raised so far. To enable students to collect even more caps, a new Pepsi machine was purchased for the Egan Lounge.

- The admission for the annual mixer sponsored by the Student Government held October 26 this year was changed from $.50 to 50 Green Stamps. Proceeds amounted to six books of stamps.

- As the Green Stamp project has been lagging, a new movement has been started in the individual classes. The classes have been divided into teams headed by one girl to give added enthusiasm to the student body. Here’s everyone’s chance to give the project the burst of effort needed to see the bus drive through the Mercyhurst gates.

- As a culmination of the project started by the Student Government of 1962-63, this year’s Government at last obtained a bus for general student use. About 900 books of stamps (which were later redeemed for money) together with $880 donated by Student Government combined with a great deal of student and committee-member enthusiasm, especially that of the chairman Ginnie Hammer, enabled the purchase of a light blue Chevrolet bus.
Why?
Mercyhurst went coed in its forty-third year

Condensed from Account 1969: A Year in Review

Mercyhurst began the active recruitment of male students following the Board of Trustees’ decision on February 3, 1969, to change the status of the then 43-year-old women’s college to a coeducational institution.

The board’s decision culminated a four-month study by college officials on the advisability of the status change. During that time, college constituents were polled and coeducational approval was received from the Mercyhurst faculty, administration, and advisory board. The student body was evenly divided on the coeducational issue.

The decision-making criteria were detailed under three main headings.

**Academic:** The trustee consensus was that a coeducational status for Mercyhurst would bring the college closer to the ideal of a liberal arts institution for which it was founded.

**Social:** The board members referred to national studies that listed monosexual education as imposing unnecessary limitations on a student’s educational experience. In addition, the trustees felt that as a coeducational institution, Mercyhurst College would provide a more realistic reflection of the society for which its students prepare.

While academic need and social involvement were termed “vital considerations” by the board, the economic standing of Mercyhurst College was perhaps the crux of the status change.

**Economic:** The legal body made an initial study of nation-wide college enrollment statistics and noted a prevailing increase in the rate of student dropouts at women’s institutions throughout the country in favor of coed learning.

According to figures available from the Office of the Registrar, Mercyhurst began to experience the enrollment decline in 1968. The 1968 decrease in registrations — and subsequently, tuition receipts — was to mark the beginning of financial problems at Mercyhurst. For the first time in its history, the college was faced with a $35,753 operating deficit at the close of its 1968-69 fiscal year.

Confronted with these facts and figures, board members were presented two options: (1) lower admission standards to meet enrollment projections and financial costs; or (2) retain the present admission requirements and attempt to meet enrollment projections by offering collegians a more attractive educational environment ... one that would hopefully serve to balance the economic scale.

Trustees chose the latter course on February 3 when the coeducational vote was called.

While the board of trustees recognized that some alumni and friends of the college would not agree that a change in status was necessary for Mercyhurst, these men and women — after careful examination and evaluation of the study findings — were convinced that the coeducational status would best benefit the academic and economic stability ... as well as future growth ... of Mercyhurst College.
Why Not Mercyhurst?

Condensed from Mercyhurst Magazine, Winter 1993

When Larie Pintea, a member of Mercyhurst’s Board of Associates, suggested the school should start a crew program shortly after the school admitted men, he found himself drafted to coach the team. Here he recalls its early days.

I had been drafted. It didn’t take me long to get used to being called “Coach Pintea.” In fact, I learned to like it, quickly.

Their first uniforms were blue headbands, handed out one at a time as they achieved certain levels of accomplishment. When they finally got lettered sweatshirts they were stunned. Suddenly, they got very serious about intercollegiate competition. I promised them that they would row Notre Dame University the first year. Since we didn’t even have oars, much less a boat, that was about as far-fetched as anything we imagined at the time.

We managed, six days a week, to get them tired. But we also made them believe that they were a team — that together they would succeed as athletes. For many of them, it was the first such experience in their lives. I think what happened was that they saw we believed in them, and so, they believed us, even the rowing Notre Dame business. Every day’s practice ended with the cheer, “Beat Notre Dame!” They had become believers in a program without equipment, financed by about $600 donated by some of Erie’s sports community.

Our first boat, the “Cornell,” was an outright gift from the Westside Rowing Association in Buffalo. We launched it, complete with eight men, from the Erie Yacht Club dock. Since there was no coaching launch, this 200-plus-pound coach gingerly got in the 60-foot boat as the coxswain (steersman of a racing shell).

The first afternoon in the yacht basin was chaos. There were oars thrashing and rowers almost levered out of the boat. Yachts were almost impaled as the lumbering “Cornell” careened from one side of the anchorage to the other. Yacht Club members watched in disbelief.

Out of pure consideration for those yachtsmen, I turned the rudder and took us out onto the bay. By the end of the afternoon we were rowing, well almost, sort of, sometimes. After two weeks of rowing on the bay, without hitting anything and without sinking, the oarsmen told me that they were ready to compete.

Off we went to Buffalo to row Canisius. Our team lost by about six boat lengths, but they made believers out of everyone who watched. They rowed the course at 38 strokes from start to finish.

The next fall, we returned to Buffalo and beat the same Canisius. It was only the Lakers second time in competition.

Some weeks later, as promised, the Mercyhurst crew journeyed to South Bend, Indiana. The original oarsmen, bolstered by several freshman oarsmen, like to remember that on Saturday, Notre Dame’s football team was beaten by Southern California.

The next day, the dedication of Notre Dame’s new boathouse, the Mercyhurst junior varsity eight beat the Irish crew by five lengths. The Laker varsity then whipped the Notre Dame varsity boat by seven lengths. The dedication party was over, quicker than expected.

Dr. Allan Belovarac ’73, a new oarsmen in that 1971 crew, who would later become the Mercyhurst crew coach for years, recalls the time, “We had no dock, no boat house, we repaired seats every day to keep rowing, but we had an unconquerable spirit.”
World’s biggest strudel?

Story from Erie Times-News Weekender, Saturday, June 28, 1986

The Mercyhurst College Hotel Restaurant Management department and Classy 100 FM radio are cooking up the recipe for a world’s record long pastry: one half mile of apple strudel.

Celebrating the Erie radio station’s first birthday, the gigantic apple-filled pastry is the sweet treat to be served starting Saturday at the Erie International air show to an estimated 31,680 dessert lovers. Classy 100 commissioned the creation by way of thanking the Erie community for a record-breaking first year as one of the nation’s fastest-growing radio stations.

Mercyhurst College accepted the challenge to break the world’s longest pastry record established by a Swedish bakers association in 1983. Daryl Georger, assistant chief of the college’s Hotel Restaurant Management department, said it’s the “ultimate culinary experience” for his Mercyhurst students.

The 2,640-foot-long pastry will eclipse the previous record by almost 65 percent. Some 24 chefs at Mercyhurst began baking Thursday and the pastry will be completed Saturday morning. The strudel will contain 9,540 apples, a ton of pastry, 2,384 pounds of filling, and 100 pounds of powdered sugar. The ice-glazed delicacy will weigh about two-and-a-quarter tons and will yield 1,972,800 calories.

The half mile of tasty pastry will be transported in two brand new tractor-trailer trucks from the college to the Erie International Airport early Saturday, complete with a police escort and helicopter. It will be set up in a huge “U” shape near the terminal runway.

According to Donald L. Kelly, owner and general manager of Classy 100 FM, Mercyhurst was the natural choice when the station went shopping for its first birthday “cake.”

“We’re working to become the best in our business,” he said, “and when we learned of Mercyhurst’s international reputation in the hotel restaurant management field, we knew we’d found the right combination.”

Mercyhurst’s Hotel Restaurant Management department has attracted students from Pakistan, the Ivory Coast, England, Ireland, and West Germany, as well as from the continental United States. Placement of graduates is about 100 percent, with 4.8 job offers per graduating student.

“We admire Mercyhurst’s combination of the academic and the practical,” Kelly stated, “which reflects our attitude toward the broadcast business.”

Coordinating the gigantic bake-off at Mercyhurst, in addition to Georger, were Paula Paschke, instructor; Kay Filipkowski, departmental assistant; and Gary Maas.

Joe Blasco from the Erie County Department of Weights and Measures will be on hand at the air show to officially measure the strudel and to confirm Mercyhurst and Classy 100 as winners of a new Guinness world record.

Epilogue: Hospitality Management Professor Daryl Georger, who helped create the record strudel, says Mercyhurst did achieve a Guinness record, but that its mark was eclipsed just a year later. Unfortunately, budget issues, liability concerns, and other factors prevented Mercyhurst from trying to reclaim the record. Georger is pictured above in the new hospitality facilities in the Center for Academic Engagement.
An everyday life for an unusual family

Condensed from a story by Mary Benson Solberg in Mercyhurst Magazine, Spring 1991

Thirteen-year-old Billy. Blind and deaf. “During your times of trial and suffering...

Eighteen-month-old Laura. Down syndrome. “...when you see only one set of footprints...

Twenty-three-year-old Beverly. Lymphangioma. Use of only head and left arm.

“... it was then that I carried you.”

The unknown author of “Footprints” might well have visited Kathie (Kaufmann ‘65) and Bob Migliaccio of Corry, Pennsylvania. With the help of their seven biological children, they “carry” 28 adopted children — including Billy, Laura, and Beverly — all in the same house, all with special needs.

Beverly, a senior communications major at Mercyhurst College, is among the oldest adopted members of the Migliaccio family still at home. “They’re unselfish, caring people. I could never imagine doing what they’re doing myself,” says Beverly, a South Carolina native who was adopted by the Migliaccios six years ago.

Neither can the Migliaccios imagine doing what Beverly does. Lymphangioma has attacked her lymphatic system since she was born, prompting her biological parents to give her up. Benign tumors for which the disease is known have snatched away her use of everything but her head and left arm. Wheelchair-bound since age 10, she’s had one arm amputated and endured countless operations, including skin grafts.

Despite the insidious nature of her ailment, Beverly anticipates graduation from Mercyhurst in May 1991. Her goal: a job in public relations or a related field.

Arms resting on a wooden, desklike board made especially by Bob Migliaccio for her motorized wheelchair, Beverly says simply, “I’ve always been determined.”

“My entire life I wanted to go to college,” Beverly explains. “Once I set my mind on something, then I can’t rest till I get it.”

Beverly, while acknowledging her own willpower, credits the Migliaccios for some of her success. While working toward her degree, Beverly has enlisted the help of 18-year-old Rob Migliaccio, whom she calls her “chauffeur,” Dad Migliaccio, and 22-year-old Michelle, a student at Villa Maria Campus of Gannon University.

To make Beverly’s trips aboard the van easier, Bob Migliaccio installed a portable lift on the vehicle. A mechanic before his forced disability after open-heart surgery last summer, Bob, at 47, is the family do-it-yourselfer. He’s now repairing their converted Greyhound bus in anticipation of upcoming trips, even to church where the family fills three pews.

Having been “carried,” sometimes physically, sometimes emotionally, Beverly knows well that brand of Migliaccio dedication. “It is,” she says, “just everyday life.”

Epilogue: After graduating in 1991, Beverly Davis-Migliaccio worked as program manager at Community Resources for Independence. She lived alone in her own apartment, owned a car, and hired attendants and drivers as needed. She died of swine flu in 2014. Kathie Migliaccio now lives in South Carolina, where her husband, Bob, died in November 2019. Though she no longer adopts children due to her age, she still has a family of 13 at home.
Alum pursues First Amendment battle all the way to Supreme Court


Sandra Mangone Zobrest ‘70, ’77 (MA) and her son, Jim, 19, who is profoundly deaf, started their search for justice for Jim in the federal court system in 1980. They reached the end of their quest with a favorable U.S. Supreme Court decision June 18, 1993.

The high court ruled that the school district should have provided a sign language interpreter for Jim while he was in high school, even if he did choose to go to a Catholic school. And, on July 1, the Zobrests and Catalina Foothills School District reached a settlement to reimburse the money the family had to pay for interpreters and lawyers to get Jim justice and a good high school education.

Sandra married Gannon University grad Larry Zobrest two years after they finished college. Their son, Jim, was born in Erie in 1974 and as soon as she knew he was deaf, Sandra started what became a virtual career as an advocate for the deaf, especially deaf children.

The Zobrests moved to Tucson in 1980. Jim attended the Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind until fifth grade, but it wasn’t challenging enough. “He was bored and we just felt he was capable of being mainstreamed into the local school district,” Sandra said. So Jim entered sixth grade at Sunrise Drive Elementary and they provided speech therapy and a sign language interpreter. But when Jim hit eighth grade, the district had no high school; instead, it paid the tuition for parents to send their kids to other schools.

Sandra and Larry decided Salpointe High School, run by the Carmelite Fathers, was Jim’s best shot at the kind of high school education they wanted for him. “We asked the school district if it would pay for an interpreter and other needs and, at first, the answer was yes,” Sandra said. But district officials got together with the county attorney and they decided, she said, “in order to be eligible for these services, my son had to attend public school.”

Sandra had been doing some research and discovered U.S. Public Law 94-142, the Education of Handicapped Children Act. “It stipulates that whether it be public, private or sectarian, handicapped children are to be provided with those services.” After one meeting with school officials, Sandra said, “I came home and said, ‘We’re fighting this.’ My husband agreed.”

Jim Zobrest’s case hit the federal courts—with a dull thud. The judge in the U.S. District Court in Tucson ruled for the state and the school district. The struggle then went to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco for a December 1990 hearing. That court took 18 months to make a decision and it was against the Zobrests.

In the meantime, Larry and Sandra Zobrest were paying $8,500 a year for an interpreter for Jim at Salpointe.

There had been one encouraging part to the Appeals Court experience. One member of the three-judge panel had issued a ringing dissent and there was hope the Supreme Court would listen to his opinion and not the majority. On February 24, the U.S. Supreme Court held a hearing and Sandra and Jim Zobrest, Mary Prus and former Erieites Ginny and Sandy Duncan got a chance to see how the court operates.

Students flocked to the campus ministry office and the student union, seeking companionship and answers to questions perhaps forever unanswered.

But for some, the riveting news coverage sparked something more, a deep and instant need to take action in a situation where everyone seemed so helpless.

A group of freshman students in McAuley residence hall approached their resident assistant, sophomore Rich Gardner, and told him they needed to organize a blood drive.

Soon Gardner and the group of young men from McAuley Hall were working together with Amy Bortz, a junior with a double major in voice and arts administration, who was working on a blood drive in the union.

By 2:30 that afternoon, the Mercyhurst Student Government shuttle was running back and forth to the Erie Community Blood Bank, a trip it would repeat over and over for several hours — rarely with an empty seat.

For another group of Mercyhurst students, the opportunity to do something presented itself through a professor in the archaeology / anthropology department.

At about 11 a.m., Dr. Dennis Dirkmaat, head of the forensic science program at the college, received a call he knew was inevitable. Dirkmaat headed down Interstate 79 to a site not far from home. Traveling with Dirkmaat were professor Allan Quinn, three graduate students — Zachary Venable, Joe Hefner, and Jeff Illingworth — and senior anthropology student Christine Fuchs.

Once the team arrived at the site, they worked with several other groups, mainly law enforcement, to grid and search the area of the crash, a huge endeavor given that wreckage was strewn over 4 million square feet.

“As anthropologists, we are best trained to take those fragments and identify them so they are useful in the investigation,” said Dirkmaat. “There are few people who do what we do, and we had a job to do that day. The students knew that and they did it well.”

Meanwhile, back in Erie, Campus Ministry worked to support the spirits of those on campus.

“When I saw the news, I knew immediately we would need to be together and to pray,” said Sister Geraldine Rosinski of Campus Ministry. By noon, only three short hours after the terror began, a group of 300-plus students, faculty, administrators, and visitors to the campus were clasping hands and working together to find the strength to understand the day’s events.

Campus Ministry also organized a Mass for later that day, and continued to hold daily noon prayer breaks for several weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks.

The group also worked closely with the students to help organize a panel discussion of the events a few days later, an opportunity to tackle the events intellectually.

For many on the Hill, the reality of a new way of life shaped by terrorist attacks on their homeland didn’t truly hit home until nearly two months after the initial impact of the fall of the World Trade Center towers.

On Tuesday, Oct. 30, everything came to a standstill after a powdery substance spilled from a letter in the admissions office, sparking a two-day ordeal for everyone on campus.

For the next 48 hours, Mercyhurst College joined the scores of other colleges, post offices, office complexes, and other sites targeted by tricksters.

Once on campus to respond to the threat, the FBI reminded the Mercyhurst community that over 7,000 hoax letters with foreign substances were sent in the six weeks following the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States, and all, except a few, tested negative for anthrax.

Despite those reassurances, the college was forced, with the help of the Erie police and fire departments, the Erie County Emergency Response Team, Hamot Medical Center, and the FBI, to quarantine, test and secure antibiotics for about 500 students, faculty, administrators, and staff.

By mid-afternoon on Thursday, Nov. 1, the scare was officially just that, but for students, parents, and other members of the Mercyhurst community, it was a sobering burst of reality on a normally quiet campus.
One team, 451,879 meters and an extraordinary test of endurance

Condensed from a story by Abby Badach Doyle in Mercyhurst Magazine, April 2013

Two minutes remained between the Mercyhurst men's rowing team and a world record. Hundreds of students rushed the stage, flooding the Mercyhurst Athletic Center stage with chants: “Row! Row! Row!” And row, these 10 student-athletes did – for 24 straight hours, all the way to an official Guinness World Record.

“I don't know if my body’s ever been to this point before,” said senior exercise science major Jake Schuppe, who rowed the final 30 seconds. Schuppe is no stranger to endurance events. He's competed in 24-hour mountain bike relays, but even that doesn’t compare.

“With the atmosphere that my team created, we pushed ourselves so far past any perceivable limit we ever thought we’d even get close to,” he said. “My body is in shambles – but, you know what? It was phenomenal. And I’d happily do it again.”

This a story of how adrenaline slays fatigue. This is the ultimate display of teamwork.

This is the Mercyhurst EnduROWthon.

On March 7-8, [2013] 10 student-athletes from the men's rowing team rowed 451,879 meters to break a record for the greatest distance rowed by a lightweight men's small team on an indoor Concept II rowing machine in a 24-hour period. Student organizers dubbed the event the “Mercyless EnduROWthon.”

To clinch the distance record, the men’s team rotated on the erg for 30-second, full-intensity shifts. The machine’s flywheel had to remain spinning for the record to be legitimate, so man-to-man transitions had to be flawless.

After 4 minutes and 30 seconds to recuperate, each rower was back on the erg. The overnight shift allowed one rower at a time to take a 40-minute nap break, challenging the remaining nine to up their intensity. But they powered through for 24 hours to make history.

And as if one world record weren’t enough, the EnduROWthon broke two. Across the stage from the men’s varsity team was another rowing machine, on which 600 people took shifts to shatter the world record for most people to row 500 meters on a single erg in 24 hours.

Mercyhurst students, faculty, administrators, and staff – even Louie the Laker – hopped on to take a turn, as did people from the Erie community.

For Jeff Murt, a senior intelligence studies major and rower, the most powerful moment of the EnduROWthon wasn’t with his varsity team. In the quiet depth of the overnight shift, a young boy with cerebral palsy got to do his part. The boy came with his mother at 4 a.m., took a seat on the erg, and rowed his way into the record books.

“His mother was in tears – it was a very powerful thing to see,” Murt said. “Honestly, even though the men’s varsity team broke the record, giving that little boy a chance to be a part of something so huge, that made this whole thing worth it.”
Former hockey All-American Kristen Cameron graduates from Mercyhurst

News release, April 24, 2019

It’s been nearly a decade since former Mercyhurst University women’s assistant ice hockey coach Kristen Cameron was struck by a hit-and-run drunk driver while bicycling on Route 19 in Summit Township.

She suffered catastrophic injuries that left her paralyzed from the chest down and limited use of her arms. It took a while, but the love and support of her family and friends and the many health care practitioners who worked with her, helped to reawaken her competitive spirit.

After years of physical rehabilitation, including a long stint at the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute’s Lyndhurst Centre, Kristen is playing sports, including as a member of the Canadian National Wheelchair Rugby team member since 2016; she’s learned to drive a car; she’s a sought-after motivational speaker; a peer support mentor with Spinal Cord Injury Ontario. And in 2014, she received the Ralph W. Braun Spirit of Ability Award in Ontario.

And, finally, after a nine-year hiatus, she will realize her dream and graduate from Mercyhurst University with a master’s degree in Organizational Leadership. Originally from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Cameron will attend her graduation in person on Sunday, May 12, at 2 p.m. at the Erie Insurance Arena. As the Sister Eustace Taylor Award recipient for excellence in Organizational Leadership, Cameron will also attend the Friday, May 10, Convocation Ceremony at 3 p.m. in the Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center.

Organizational Leadership program director Dr. Anne Zaphiris said Cameron earned her degree through online and correspondence classes, achieving a 3.9 GPA.

In nominating Cameron for the Sister Eustace Taylor Award, Zaphiris said, “Extraordinary leaders have resilience; finding meaning in adversity, persevering without losing hope, and emerging stronger and transformed with newfound commitment and abilities. Kristen Cameron exemplifies these characteristics.”

“It’s hard to put into words how much it means to finally finish this degree,” said Cameron. “The entire Mercyhurst community, in particular Professor Zaphiris, has been incredibly supportive. I’m proud to finally close the door on this chapter of my life so I can seize the opportunities this degree will help bring in the future.”
Emissaries ensure Mercy spirit still animates campus

Condensed from a story by Sean Cuneo in Mercyhurst Magazine, Fall 2018

Since Sister Lisa Mary McCartney first came to Mercyhurst as a cadet student more than 50 years ago, Mercyhurst has experienced a number of milestones.

The first lay college president. The move to coeducation and the first class of men. The first graduate program.

McCartney’s retirement in May [2018], however, marked another important first for Mercyhurst: For the first time in the institution’s 92-year history, Mercyhurst does not have a Sister of Mercy employed full time on campus.

“When I came to Mercyhurst, the president was a Sister, the dean was a Sister, Sisters worked in food service, every residence hall had at least one Sister. It was a different world,” McCartney said.

With the numbers of priests and women religious declining on college campuses, faith-based institutions increasingly turn to newly established “mission officers” to safeguard their founding ideals. In 2008, Mercyhurst joined the ranks, naming McCartney as the first vice president for mission integration and charging her to assimilate the university’s educational mission, Catholic identity, and legacy of the Sisters of Mercy.

“I determined that the role of the vice president of mission would be to tend to employees,” she said. “If the employees get the mission, it is they who will pass it on through teaching and daily interactions with students.”

In her first years on the job, a campus-wide survey found that most people did not think Mercyhurst’s mission could continue without the Sisters of Mercy.

“Immediately, I thought that’s a perception we’ve got to change,” she said.

The decision was made to establish a voluntary employee Mercy Mission training program, which would become known as the Mercy Emissary Program. Loosely modeled on the Mercy Associate program of the Sisters of Mercy, the program—which is open to employees of all faith backgrounds—consists of a series of monthly gatherings throughout the academic year. The first semester addresses Mercy while the second focuses on Catholic higher education. The training concludes with a daylong retreat.

Looking ahead to Mercyhurst’s future, change is inevitable. But McCartney is optimistic that thanks to buy-in from the university leadership, the Mercy Mission will continue to make Mercyhurst special.

“The essential mission identity will protect Mercyhurst from becoming just another mid-size liberal arts college,” she said. “With a clear, vibrant mission identity, Mercyhurst can evolve while remaining distinctive, and be effectively nimble.”

Epilogue: More than 150 staff and faculty members completed Mercy Emissary training during the program’s first five years. Thirty students signed up for the first student cohort last year, most completing their study from home after COVID-19 struck. The first Emissary training session for Mercyhurst alumni began this fall.

Your gift can help Mercyhurst during this challenging year

We hope this special issue of Mercyhurst Magazine has been uplifting and left you with a renewed sense of pride in your association with Mercyhurst.

Please consider helping Mercyhurst and our students persevere through a challenging year by supporting this year’s Mercyhurst Annual Fund. You can fund an area of interest at Mercyhurst or provide support directly to students via the new Student Scholarship Program.

No matter what you support, your gift at any level is extremely valued and appreciated by our entire campus community.

Thank You and Carpe Diem!

You can support this effort by visiting mercyhurst.edu/annual-fund.
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Through work, service, and leadership, alumni of Mercyhurst College and Mercyhurst University demonstrate an enduring belief in the value of a Mercyhurst education, one rooted in the Mercy Mission and inspired by the compassion, hospitality, and entrepreneurial spirit of the Sisters of Mercy. If you are interested in pursuing graduate studies to move into a greater leadership role or change career paths to enter a field with more opportunity, we are ready to connect you with a flexible and affordable graduate program to meet your goals!

We are pleased to offer special discounted alumni pricing on tuition for select Mercyhurst graduate programs. These benefits include a special $9,990 flat rate for the Organizational Leadership online master’s (a savings of more than $15,000)*, and up to 35 percent off regular tuition for select master’s programs and graduate certificates (a savings of more than $9,000 on eligible master’s programs).

* Nationally, Organizational Leadership master’s programs average $22,000 in tuition costs, while comparable MBA programs cost between $50,000 and $80,000.

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