Creating a legacy of inspiration

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A message from the President

As I write this, August is days away and the calmer stretch of time that June and July bring to campus is quickly slipping away. I enjoy the transition between summer and fall and the rejuvenation that accompanies it.

As we commence Academic Year 2019-2020, we are energized with a new slate of goals, priorities, and plans of action – all in service to our students who, by the way, never cease to amaze me. In June, for example, we learned that four students in Dr. Joe Morris’ political science class took top honors in a competition sponsored by Draw The Lines PA, a statewide civic education initiative intended to help Pennsylvanians learn more about political redistricting and gerrymandering. The redistricting maps and essays our students produced took first (Logan Ford) and second place (Miranda Henry) and two of three honorable mentions (Sydney Gondringer and Admir Barucija) in the Higher Education-West category.

To see our students dominate the winners’ circle like that is a testament to the education they receive at Mercyhurst and to the outstanding faculty members who inspire this kind of accomplishment.

While deeply honored to be president of our beloved university, my days as a business professor in the Walker College, and the relationships I cultivated with our students, were among the most rewarding.

Our cover story tells of one such relationship, and my attempts to help a senior business major by the name of Brian DeFrancesco identify and capitalize on his leadership skills. I did not learn that my efforts had had any effect until 13 years later when that young entrepreneur returned to Mercyhurst to thank me for believing in him. I can’t imagine a more personally fulfilling moment in my career than that one, and I suspect many of our faculty know the feeling. These are the relationships that differentiate Mercyhurst.

Brian is one of several Mercyhurst alumni featured in our Fall 2019 magazine whose entrepreneurial DNA has reaped rewards for themselves, their families and the lives of many others. One of the tenets of a Mercyhurst education is to engender a love of lifelong learning, which is also a key characteristic of entrepreneurs: Entrepreneurs always seek to learn and to get better at what they do.

As our magazine will show, entrepreneurship certainly is not a new concept at Mercyhurst. You’ll also read about Sister Mary Eymard Poydock, RSM, one of our early biology teachers who – with few resources but remarkable determination – created a respected cancer research program here in the 1960s and ’70s.

So, take a moment to peruse our magazine and reconnect. We appreciate your interest in and support of our Mercyhurst community.

Carpe Diem.

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

ON THE COVER:

Brian DeFrancesco ’06 is pictured in the offices of SMET Ventures, his business investment and technology firm in Orange County, California. Before founding SMET, DeFrancesco led two companies from inception to successful exit acquisitions totaling nearly $100M in value.
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Successful tech entrepreneur passes on legacy of inspiration

Brian DeFrancesco ‘06

It’s been said that “Success isn’t just about what you accomplish in your life; it’s about what you inspire others to do.” While it’s hard to argue that individual achievements don’t validate success, it’s undeniable that inspiration is the greatest legacy that one can create.

The story of Mercyhurst President Michael Victor and Mercyhurst Class of 2006 alumnus Brian DeFrancesco is an example of how inspiration and leading by example can have a crucial and lasting impact.

A product and technology entrepreneur now living in Orange County, California, DeFrancesco was a senior in the final Business Policy & Strategy course that Victor taught at Mercyhurst as dean of the university’s business school. For their senior capstone projects, Victor organized his students into groups, and charged each with preparing a business plan for a local organization. He appointed DeFrancesco to lead the group working with the YMCAs of Greater Erie County.

“I recognized Brian’s leadership abilities early on,” Victor said. “I wanted to let him know I believed in him to be a successful leader for the capstone project, but more importantly for his career after Mercyhurst.”

DeFrancesco remembers the class well. “It was the culmination of my studies at Mercyhurst and the final preparation for the real world of business,” he said. “Students respected Victor immensely because he had been a very successful business CEO. So, when he believed in me, it gave me a ton of confidence — especially at such a pivotal time in my life.”

Victor said DeFrancesco and his team did an excellent job on their case study and that the YMCA ultimately put some of their recommendations into practice. DeFrancesco spent the remainder of his last semester learning as much as he could from Victor and getting involved in more leadership initiatives, such as becoming president of Mercyhurst’s Delta Mu Delta Business Honor Society. After DeFrancesco’s graduation from Mercyhurst in 2006, the two went their own ways. Victor went on to become president of Lake Erie College for the next nine years and then return to Mercyhurst as president in 2015, while DeFrancesco pursued his own career in business and entrepreneurship.

With a major in Business Finance and a minor in Computer Systems, DeFrancesco’s career took him across the country, eventually settling in California, where he found a natural fit for both his business and technology abilities. After learning the ropes in roles at various digital data, media, and advertising companies, he quickly worked his way up to become an executive, including roles as vice president of Product and Technology at Vindico and Specific Media (acquired by Time, Inc.).

In his early 30s, he embarked on his entrepreneurial journey and set out on a new mission — to make a difference through philanthropy, inspiration, and thought leadership. The first step was to reconnect with Victor. Last spring, 13 years after they had parted ways, the two caught up over lunch in the State Dining Room. “It was a surreal experience,” said DeFrancesco, who told Victor about his career path and desire to give back.

Victor was equally awed and elated. Like any good teacher and mentor, and Mercyhurst is known for many, Victor felt rewarded to know that he may have played a role in his former student’s success. Most of all, he was proud that his example had such a profound effect on DeFrancesco.

“I really wanted him to know that he set a great example,” said DeFrancesco. “Seeing him devote his time to higher education and to lead and inspire students when he could have easily retired after his successful business career was a great example of how to not define success from what you achieve in business alone, but by how you give back and inspire others.”

Today, DeFrancesco is giving back on multiple fronts. He currently runs SMET Ventures, through which he consults and invests in small businesses to help other entrepreneurs realize their dreams. In addition, he and his wife, Jessica, oversee a charitable foundation they founded to empower people to overcome hardship and enhance their well-being.

He’s also showing his gratitude to his alma mater, which was part of the reason for his recent visit to Mercyhurst.

“Mercyhurst was a turning point in my life,” he said. “When I heard Michael Victor had become president, I had even more pride in the university and belief in its future, so I wanted to help where I could.”

Since reconnecting last spring:

• The two re-established their friendship;
• DeFrancesco agreed to Victor’s request to become a member of the university’s board of trustees; and,
• He generously gifted Mercyhurst the funds it needed to complete renovations to the Hammermill Library.

Most importantly, they share the commitment to continue to collaborate and inspire others in the Mercyhurst community and beyond.
Hurst alums take the plunge to become business owners

“Entrepreneurship is at the core of the American dream. It’s about blazing new trails, about believing in yourself, your mission, and inspiring others to join you in the journey. What sets [entrepreneurs] apart is the will, courage and sometimes recklessness to actually do it.”

– Derek Hutson, president and CEO of Datical

In this issue we profile a few Mercyhurst alumni who’ve actually done it – pursued their entrepreneurial dreams and created their own businesses.

They followed different paths. Most worked for others first – until they discovered the niche they were meant to fill and struck out on their own. Others changed fields completely, turning passions unrelated to their previous jobs into profitable enterprises.

They’ve all been successful, but still dream of growing their businesses even further. Perhaps the “Carpe Diem” spirit they experienced on campus inspired them.

Sara Andriacchi Brennan

Sara Andriacchi Brennan earned a biology degree at Mercyhurst in 2007 and a master’s in secondary education in 2009, but today she owns one of the most prominent interior design firms in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Sara’s married to Mitch Brennan, a native of Australia who played basketball for Mercyhurst. When their son, Mason, arrived, she stopped teaching. “I was not the stay-at-home mom I thought I was going to be,” she laughed, and she was bitten by the entrepreneurial bug. Her WIRL Project (What It’s Really Like), a social sharing platform that allowed users to create profiles and house their blogs on her website, was attracting investors, but a difficult second pregnancy put the project on hold. She never went back.

Instead, after daughter Shae was born, the Brennans moved into their dream home and Sara began to decorate it. Soon, the home she was creating for her young family started attracting attention – and job offers.

About a year ago, she decided to get serious and turn her avocation into a business. Her office is in her home and she has just one full-time employee, but she’s developed exclusive partnerships with contractors and kitchen and bath specialists who help turn her ideas into reality. She relies heavily on Instagram to promote her business, a one-stop shop that can take spaces from bare bones to that “HGTV moment” at the end.

Sara coined the term “romantic transitional” to describe her style. “I love soft, feminine elements in a space, but mixed with the timeless and clean lines of transitional style,” she explained.

She’s built a business that works well while she’s raising children, but that she’ll be able to scale as life allows. And, make no mistake, she plans to scale it big. “I want it all – a TV show, a magazine column, the furniture line, the accessory line. I want to be one of the greats in the design industry. I want romantic transitional to be the next big thing.” You can cross one item off that wish list: she recently began writing for Cottages and Bungalows magazine.

And she hopes her story will inspire people who don’t have a linear path to follow their dreams.

Be really clear on what you want to do, she advised, and that you have a passion for it. “If you have that fire and passion, you can sustain it.”

Learn more about her work at saralynnbrennan.com. Follow her on Instagram @saralynnbrennan.
Whitney Otto Berkowsky ’11

Even while she was working in sales in New York City, 2011 fashion merchandising grad Whitney Otto Berkowsky had a side gig she named Otto & Berk. Friends (and friends of friends) commissioned her to create unique wedding invitations.

When she and husband Jonathan Berkowsky decided to start a family, she left her full-time job and focused on her design work instead. Their son, JJ, is now 2 ½, and Whitney’s company is growing just as fast as he is.

Rather than doing custom invitations, she now designs greeting cards that are sold in 75 small businesses around the country. She spread the word about her business through the Faire website, a wholesale marketplace that connects small businesses with artisans. She’s expecting to grow her client list even more after taking part in her first trade show. She launched an entirely new collection, including seasonal greeting cards, notebooks, notepads, and calendars, at the National Stationery Show in August in New York City.

It’s a one-person operation, with Whitney handling all design, and the business operation as well, from her home in Lawrence, New Jersey.

She’s a self-taught graphic designer, but puts her retail background to use as she handles sales. Her dad, also an entrepreneur, helped her navigate the incorporation of the business.

She says she designs cards for the bold and beautiful woman, juxtaposing beautiful florals with bold typography. She writes all the copy, too, often incorporating some humor.

Everything is sourced and manufactured in the United States, and she’s worked hard to make her products eco-friendly – using partially recycled paper (produced at plants operating on wind energy) and compostable packaging.

Whitney also focuses on giving back to her community and frequently shares a portion of her profits with organizations she believes in.

As she grows her company, Whitney says she’d like to maintain her “shop small” focus. “I want to focus on small stores – those are the people that really make a difference in this country and I want to be a part of it.

“Starting a business is not easy, but if it’s something you love doing, it will energize you in a way that will allow you to get past whatever the difficulties are,” she said. “Accept the fear that will come with any new job and use that to your advantage. If it scares you, you’re probably doing the right thing.”

See Whitney’s work at ottoandberk.com.

Anthony Maher ’02

Anthony Maher ’02 is a born entrepreneur who’s made it his mission to champion other entrepreneurs.

A soccer All-American at Mercyhurst, Anthony played professional soccer for 10 years. After his sports career, he never considered working for someone else. “It was always a question of what can I create, what can I build,” he said.

He wanted to control his own destiny, a lesson he’d absorbed from Coach John Melody ’90, along with a strong work ethic, a drive to succeed, and an obsession with winning.

In 2013 he partnered with his brother and sister-in-law, Michael and Jennifer Maher, to create Benjamin’s Desk, a Philadelphia co-working space. From the start, Benjamin’s Desk offered clients more than just space – it was all about building a community and providing services to help startups grow their businesses.

The business flourished, attracting tenants like Uber and the social commerce platform Curalate and being chosen to manage the University of Pennsylvania’s business incubator, Pennovation Center. That led to a merger in 2017 with

Washington-based 1776, making Anthony the CEO of the largest network of business incubators in the country.

Anthony stepped down to an advisory role with 1776 last year when he realized that the travel required by the job wasn’t good for his growing family. Anthony and wife Anne are raising four young sons, Roman, Anthony, Michael – and Apollo, who arrived July 29.

At the start of 2019, Anthony became partner and president of University Place Associates, a real estate development firm started by Scott Mazo, a former Benjamin’s Desk/1776 investor. They expect to break ground by the end of the year on 3.0 University Place, a $100 million building that will anchor a research and innovation district along Philadelphia’s Market Street.

Anthony said he loves building startup ecosystems and is using his extensive network of contacts to “curate” a tenant list. UPA has already partnered with Wistar, a biomedical research organization, and the Ben Franklin Technology Partnership will create an entire “innovation floor” and advise on the unique needs of tech startups.

UPA is also committed to minimizing the building’s impact on the environment and enhancing the health and productivity of those who will work inside it.

To others considering starting their own companies, Anthony says, “Go into it with your eyes wide open. It’s going to be hard. You’re going to face obstacles, but if you’re driven and if you have the perseverance inside, you’re going to succeed.”

Visit upaphila.com.
Ben Bluemle ‘06

Ben Bluemle ‘06 had been working in real estate in Atlanta for about three years when he decided to start his own firm in Savannah. He immediately put the skills he’d acquired as an intelligence studies major to work.

“I got every piece of data I could get about the Savannah market and ran a ton of analytics to confirm it was the right market for me,” he said. He opened Seaport Real Estate Group – named to honor Savannah’s rich history – in 2010.

Seaport was pretty traditional at first, but soon adopted a creative video marketing strategy that had set the company apart. “I wasn’t the first to do a real estate video,” Ben explained. “But I worked with a movie production company so I had a level of quality no one had seen before.”

As he told South magazine, “In my videos, if the house has a pool, I’m jumping into it. If it has water access, I’m paddleboarding. One seller is a car dealer, so I’m driving up in the video in one of his most premier cars. These videos have allowed us to stand out against other real estate companies because we have pushed the limits to sell real estate differently – and in a more fun way – than it’s ever been done, especially in this market.”

He also uses an online video series titled “Port Talk” to position Seaport as the go-to source for real estate information.

It’s paid off. His firm is among the most successful in Savannah and he was ranked the No. 201 agent in the United States. He now has 26 agents working for him, with additional offices in Philadelphia and northeast Georgia, and he’s considering a fourth site in his hometown of Pittsburgh.

He advises entrepreneurs to think big. “When you’re dreaming, dream so big that people will look at you and laugh. And then think about it every second of every day.” Anticipate growth, he suggests, and put policies and procedures in place now so you don’t have to reinvent the wheel later. As an entrepreneur, he said, you must be willing to fail and should actually strive to fail at something every day – otherwise, you’re not pushing yourself hard enough. Be willing to invest in yourself first and ensure that you are growing yourself somehow each day before you focus on the company.

And understand that you may have to make some real sacrifices to reach your goal. In Ben’s case, that meant leaving his girlfriend behind in Atlanta for the 2 ½ years it took him to get Seaport going. Megan was completely supportive. Now Ben’s wife, she worked as a Seaport agent for a time, but is now busy at home with Lillian, 4; Anderson, 2; and Cameron, born July 1.

Visit seaportrealestategroup.com.

Dawn Preske Britt ‘90

Seventeen is Dawn Britt’s lucky number. That’s one reason the business she created in 2013 is known as the OneSeven Agency.

Dawn Preske Britt graduated from Mercyhurst in 1990 with majors in marketing and fashion merchandising. She worked in the beauty and fashion retail industries on the East Coast for several years. Then, ready for a change, she moved west to Las Vegas, where she could advance her career in the hospitality and entertainment industries.

From 2002 until 2013, she worked for Sands Corp., rising to become executive corporate director of communications for the Fortune 500 company. She had more than a decade of public relations and marketing experience in Las Vegas, including overseeing the opening of the $1 billion Palazzo property in 2007, before she decided to launch her own company.

Dawn had worked with many agencies when she oversaw communications for The Venetian and The Palazzo, but was never completely satisfied. She wanted an agency that understood how to integrate all communication media to create the strongest message possible for a brand.

So she created a business to provide what she had sought when she was the client. OneSeven Agency is a full-service integrated marketing agency – she described it as one source that fuses seven core traditional and non-traditional facets of communications to produce strong, measurable results: marketing, public relations, social media, creative, digital, events, and partnerships.

Dawn had the PR and marketing communications background and her business and life partner H Farahi owned a boutique creative agency and printing company. In the beginning, she worked at her dining room table, but seven years later the business has grown to a staff of 15 and a 5,000-square-foot office. The client list has grown from just one – Emeril Lagasse’s restaurants – to more than 40, with a focus in hospitality, restaurants, nonprofits, health and wellness, beauty, consumer lifestyle, and entertainment brands.

She’s now hired a creative content manager, a social media coordinator, and a vice president for business development, marketing and events. The agency has a presence in the major media markets of Los Angeles and New York, and is looking for possible future expansions in Dallas, Houston, and Austin.

Her advice to potential entrepreneurs? “Just do it. But be ready to work really hard – I’m not kidding 24/7 – the business needs to be your child, your passion, your everything. Don’t be afraid to do it, because you’re never going to be ready, and all the studying in the world won’t make you ready.”

She says her focus has always been on building and maintaining relationships with everyone, as you never know when a relationship will become an opportunity. Being an entrepreneur is all about having strong relationships and savvy networking skills.

Visit one7communications.com.
Mercy sister’s pioneering cancer research made headlines in ’60s, ’70s

By Sue Corbran

When she decided to bring cancer research to Mercyhurst, even Sister Eymard Poydock probably had no idea just how far her team would go.

She started in 1961 in a makeshift laboratory under the eaves of Egan Hall and with a shoestring budget. But over nearly three decades, Sister Eymard would recruit dozens of Mercyhurst students – and adult community volunteers – into her study.

At its peak in the mid-1970s, Sister’s team developed a cancer-fighting compound that attracted nationwide attention. The researchers dubbed their combination of vitamins and enzymes “Mercytamin” in tribute to the Sisters of Mercy. Though the product never made it to market, for a time it seemed to hold great promise for curing some cancers.

Writing for Prevention magazine in 1982, alumnus Randy Byrd ’74 said, “It appeared that Sister Eymard had found a cancer-inhibiting agent that not only stops many kinds of cancer, but does so with absolutely no side effects in healthy tissue.”

Today, websites that promote alternative treatments for cancer still suggest patients give the treatment a try, one of them calling it a “nun’s divine cancer cure.”

Modest beginnings

Sister Eymard added research to her biology curriculum in 1961-62. She taught junior biology majors the basics of biological research, and then mentored seniors as they conducted their own experiments.

The program started small, very small. After getting the OK from President Sister Loretta McHale, Sister Eymard had to find space and equipment.

“We started from the subbasement of Egan to the 4th floor ‘cat walk,’ but we could not find any available space,” Sister Eymard later wrote. “Sister Loretta then told me I could use one free room on Egan 3rd until a floor could be put on the left side of the cat walk.” Sister Eymard sold a secondhand typewriter she’d been given and used the $50 to pay for that flooring and for shelving to hold her mouse cages.

The cancer research project would grow into other makeshift locations in Old Main. Small annual grants from the National Science Foundation and the American Cancer Society through the 1960s helped purchase needed equipment and paid stipends to the students carrying out the experiments. But when Zurn Hall of Science and Fine Arts opened in 1968, Sister Eymard finally got the facility she needed, designed and equipped to carry on her research.
The path to ‘Mercytamin’

Sister Eymard had completed a fellowship in 1960 at the Institutum Divi Thomae, a graduate school for scientific research in Cincinnati, and earned her Ph.D. in biology and experimental medicine there in 1965.

The first research projects her students conducted grew out of Sister Eymard's work at the Institutum Divi Thomae, working alongside her mentors, Drs. George Sperti and John Fardon. The research focused on how a developing tumor affects cell division in normal body tissue surrounding the cancer cells. Each year, she shepherded her students through increasingly complex studies of cancer in mice. Eventually, projects began to focus on how cancer-fighting drugs affected other parts of the body, with an eye to mitigating some of their devastating side effects. Only later did the thought of finding an actual cure for cancer emerge.

Her students continued to do excellent work, but turnover was high as they graduated and moved on to graduate school or research jobs. So, in 1969, Sister Eymard expanded cancer research again, starting an evening course for adult volunteers. Seven community members completed the three years of training.

It was one of those volunteers – local pharmacist Damian “Dan” Gallina – who first proposed the concept that eventually became “Mercytamin.” Then Sister Eymard and her team went to work. The tests involved implanting cancerous tumors in laboratory mice, then injecting half of them with a combination of Vitamin C and Vitamin B12. They discovered that the tumors continued to grow rapidly in untreated mice, but cancer growth stopped completely in those exposed to the vitamin compound. In addition, the treated animals lived longer than those that didn’t receive C and B12.

Promising results occurred as early as 1973, but a cautious Sister Eymard kept up her diligent pursuit accruing positive data. In 1975, a newspaper report noted that the compound had already been created 86 separate times – and tested through 186 experiments. Once the National Cancer Institute corroborated her results, Sister Eymard was ready to share her work. In 1979, her paper appeared in the journal Experimental Cell Biology.

Sister published more than a dozen papers in a variety of scientific journals, but she also noted proudly, “This research gave Mercyhurst million-dollar publicity when the results of experiments done at Mercyhurst were aired from coast-to-coast on CBS under the title ‘Report on Medicine.’”

Sister Eymard clearly hoped her work would lead to trials on larger animals and eventually on humans. But despite modifications to the original Mercytamin compound, they weren’t able to develop a formulation that was consistently effective. The research program – funded for 20 years primarily with just $75,000 in grants from the NSF and American Cancer Society – had neither the money nor the resources to pursue it further.

Still, Dan Gallina – now retired and living in Erie – wonders if they may have been on the right track. He says cancer researchers are now investigating some of the same cellular reactions, such as DNA methylation via vitamin B12, that Hurst researchers explored all those years ago.

Sister Eymard documented her career and the cancer research project in scrapbooks that have been digitized by the Mercyhurst University Archives. You can view them at archives.mercyhurst.edu.

Were you involved with Sister Eymard’s cancer research project? We’d love to hear your story. Email Sue Corbran at scorbran@mercyhurst.edu.
Kern gift creates presidential residence

For years, the stately brick Tudor at 3906 State Street with its elegant leaded glass windows and steeply pitched slate roof served as the family home of Bruce and Nancy Kern.

Thanks to a generous gift from the Kern family, the 4,295 square feet of spacious rooms, gleaming hardwood floors, and ornate black walnut woodwork is now the official Presidential Residence of Mercyhurst University.

President Michael Victor says the home – now known as the Kern House – promises to become a social and cultural center where the university can host alumni, students, faculty, and other special guests. While he doesn’t plan to move from his family home in Millcreek, it will also be the home of future Mercyhurst presidents.

Bruce and Nancy Kern are longtime supporters of Mercyhurst; their son, Scott, currently serves on the board of trustees. When they decided to part with the home they had lived in for nearly 30 years, they wanted it in the hands of someone who could appreciate its architectural integrity and take responsibility as good stewards.

“Architecturally, the house is a natural fit for Mercyhurst,” Nancy said. “It looks like it could be sitting right on campus and not be out of place. We knew we’d be putting it in good hands.”

During the years the Kerns lived there, it had a cozy, casual vibe. In its new role, it will be decidedly more formal.

Betsy Frank, director of executive office projects and events, has overseen the renovation. For months, she haunted high-end consignment boutiques throughout the region in search of furnishings and décor that would match the home’s 1920s origins. She didn’t need to locate a dining set, though – the set that belonged to original owners James and Anna Dwyer had remained in the house. But she did locate a mural of the Virginia countryside that will enhance the dining room.

The kitchen will be functional for a presidential family in the future, but it also boasts three ovens, a wine refrigerator, and other equipment needed for catering official Mercyhurst events.

Outside, the university painted the trim in a rich brown-and-cream combination to reflect the classic Tudor style, and repaired the nearly 90-year-old slate roof.

The first phase of improvements included the exterior work and the first-floor public spaces. Eventually the four bedrooms and three baths on the second floor will be restored; the third floor could be converted into additional living space.

The newly renovated Kern House will be open to the public Nov. 9 and 10 as a stop on the fifth annual Holiday Tour of Homes to benefit the Erie Philharmonic.
Historic ties to Mercyhurst

Mercyhurst’s new presidential residence sits several blocks from campus, but fits perfectly with the school’s architectural style. As it turns out, it’s also a great historical fit.

When the Kerns’ generous donation was announced, Trustee Patrick Weschler, an Erie history buff, was quick to point out, “I don’t think there is a residence in Erie with more Mercyhurst connections.”

The beautiful Tudor Norman home was built in 1928 for James B. and Anna Ryan Dwyer. The Dwyers’ two eldest sons would go on to operate the family business, Firch Baking.

Their third son, James B. Dwyer Jr., became a lawyer and later an Erie County judge. Along the way, he became involved at Mercyhurst at a pivotal time in its history.

In 1961, Sister Carolyn Herrmann created the school’s first advisory board of lay people to help guide the college’s future. James B. Dwyer Jr. was one of the first community leaders appointed to serve.

Two years later, Mercyhurst’s trustees – then all Sisters of Mercy – voted to add two laypeople to the board, and James B. Dwyer Jr. and Richard Wehle became the school’s first lay trustees. As Dr. Roy Strausbaugh noted in his history of Mercyhurst, “The college was no longer the sole province of the Sisters of Mercy. The new board, including these two laymen, appointed Sister Carolyn Herrmann president on Oct. 8, 1963.”

Judge Dwyer grew up in the home at 3906 State. In 1962, he and his wife, Margaret Quinn Dwyer, bought the family home and moved in with their six children. Attorney Peter Schaaf, who also served as a Mercyhurst trustee, and his wife, Peg, purchased the home in 1970, and the Kerns purchased it from the Schaafs in the late 1980s.

Many other familiar Mercyhurst names also have ties to the new presidential residence. For instance, Judge Dwyer’s sister Ruth married prominent Erie builder Bob Baldwin and moved across the street from her childhood home to 3857 State Street. Bob Baldwin and his brother, Art, both later served as Mercyhurst trustees. (Baldwin Hall, a residence for women on the Mercyhurst campus, is named in honor of their aunt, Mabel Baldwin.)

Margaret Quinn Dwyer was an early member of the Carpe Diem Society, a group of female graduates and friends of the college formed in 1966 to help with friend-making and fundraising. Like many family members, she had attended Mercyhurst Seminary, which operated in the same building as the college until Mercyhurst Preparatory School opened on Grandview Boulevard in 1963.

Family gatherings at the Dwyer house usually included a variety of Quinns and Weschlers, too. Margaret Dwyer’s widowed father, Frank Quinn, had married Florence Weschler. Sister Mary Charles Weschler, the legendary chemistry teacher at Mercyhurst, was one of Florence’s siblings. And Patrick Weschler is the son of their brother, Frank Weschler.
Anthro alumni search for answers in high-profile forensics cases

By Deborah W. Morton

They are helpless to stave off a hurricane, a wild fire, or a drug deal turned deadly, but they are there in the grisly after-effects that define their work as forensic anthropologists.

Many graduates of Mercyhurst University’s master’s degree program in the Department of Applied Forensic Sciences are doing the kind of field work that Dr. Dennis Dirkmaat and his colleagues prepared them to do in analyzing skeletal remains. Are they human? If so, was the person male or female? What about age, stature, geographic ancestry, and probable cause of death? They call it the “biological profile.”

In the past year, a handful of those grads have been busy with high-profile cases. Last winter, Dirkmaat and alumnae Andrea Ost and Rhian Dunn, who spent the 2018-2019 academic year teaching in the same program from which they graduated, traveled to San Juan, Puerto Rico, to put their skills to work in the morgue.

Budget cuts in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria (September 2017) left an overcrowded morgue and depleted professional staff to identify victims of the most destructive hurricane to hit Puerto Rico in modern times. Dirkmaat was among the sought-after experts called upon to help by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) and National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG).

He, Ost, and Dunn volunteered their time and made the trip with five other board-certified forensic anthropologists, hailing from Washington, D.C., Missouri, Texas, New York, and Louisiana.

As grad students at Mercyhurst, Dunn and Ost worked on dozens of cases, scenarios that typically included the retrieval of on-site remains and return to Mercyhurst for lab analysis. In San Juan, they worked five days straight, sunup to sundown, in the disaster morgue, gratified that they were able to use their skills to help close the remaining 47 cases there.

Last fall, another Mercyhurst grad, Dr. Kyra Stull, was among a team tasked with identifying victims of the 215-square-mile Camp Fire in Paradise, California. Stull, who co-led a team of 10 students from the University of Nevada, Reno, where she is an assistant professor, is accustomed to identifying burn victims from her years at Mercyhurst and beyond. She earned her doctorate from the University of Pretoria in South Africa.

Still, she told USA Today, nothing in her catalogue of crime scenes and disasters approached the scope of the damage she witnessed at Paradise. “I’ve never experienced anything like that before,” she said, although admittedly her Mercyhurst education was instrumental in preparing her.

“Dr. Dirkmaat established a program that had the perfect mix of hands-on experience and classroom-based knowledge that resulted in competent anthropologists,” she said. “Additional experience working with the short courses he offered each summer enabled us to learn from and work with some of the best in the field as well as establish professional relationships.”

Looking back, she said Mercyhurst offered more than a rigorous academic program; the camaraderie among the forensic anthropology faculty and cohorts had its own perks. “I still work with, publish with, and am friends with

Forensic anthropologists Kyra Stull, left, and Tatiana Vlemincq walk through a trailer park destroyed by the Camp Fire in Paradise, California, on Nov. 17, 2018. (Reuters/Terray Sylvester)
my colleagues from Mercyhurst;” she said. “Not all graduate programs foster that type of relationship and collegiality. My experiences at Mercyhurst have definitely shaped how I run my own research lab today and how I interact with my students as well as encourage them to interact with one another.”

Last year, another Mercyhurst grad, Erin Chapman ’10, was the subject of a feature in The Buffalo News, about her unique role as a forensic anthropologist in the Erie County (New York) Medical Examiner’s Office, and the many interesting cases she is called upon to evaluate, from bodies pulled from the lake and rivers around Buffalo to the remains of murder victims discovered in the woods.

“Chapman is one of a small number of anthropologists in the nation who works in a medical examiner’s office;” the Buf News noted. “Most medical examiners employ forensic pathologists who examine organs, soft tissues and bodily fluids to determine a cause of death. By contrast, forensic anthropologists study skeletal remains.”

Unlike colleagues who have built careers in academia, Chapman derives satisfaction from being an asset to law enforcement, largely driven by her Mercyhurst experience where she said the opportunity to assist with active forensic casework is unmatched by any other institution. In fact, she was introduced to the staff of her current employer nearly 15 years ago through cases on which Dirkmaat’s department had lent assistance.

Clearly, the nature of her work gives many people pause, and she’s used to their bewilderment. “Each person has a role to fulfill and, although mine may not seem appealing to everyone, there are a number of careers that I am not emotionally equipped to perform,” she said. “Learning to focus on the science helps me to remain as unbiased as possible and emotionally detached at some level. To best serve a deceased individual and their family, one must put feelings aside and focus on answering the important questions in order to bring a family the justice or answers they seek.”

When it comes to niche academic programs at Mercyhurst, forensic anthropology gets its nod time and again for the volume of real cases students work on while attending college. Dirkmaat often reflects upon the year he welcomed a group of new grad students to the first day of class. He hadn’t even learned their names when he told them to “pack up, we’re going down state to process the scene of a plane crash.” And so it began … and so it continues.

Mercyhurst rolls out red carpet for forensic anthropology all-stars

When Dr. Dennis Dirkmaat began the graduate program in forensic anthropology at Mercyhurst University 15 years ago, he had high hopes that the students trained under his watch would go on to top-flight doctoral programs and the careers of their dreams.

The master’s degree program represented the first in the country focused primarily on providing students with a comprehensive basic training regimen in the field. To this day, Dirkmaat and his team of faculty and graduate students are regularly called upon by law enforcement, coroners, and medical examiners across the tri-state area to evaluate cases from human death scenes, spanning crimes to natural disasters.

Over the summer Dirkmaat welcomed back some of those trailblazers as part of his “All-Stars Forensic Anthropology Short Course.” Thirteen students were enrolled in the two week course, hoping to glean knowledge; improve their skills, and even snag career advice from nine of the earliest students in Dirkmaat’s program who have gone on to achieve success in the field.

The visiting alumni presenters included:

- Dr. Joseph Hefner ’99, Dirkmaat’s first graduate student, currently an Assistant Professor of Anthropology and director of the Forensic Anthropology Laboratory at Michigan State University
- Dr. Kyra Stull ’08, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Nevada, Reno
- Dr. Heather Garvin ’07, Assistant Professor of Anatomy at Des Moines University Medical School, Des Moines, Iowa
- Dr. Nicholas Passalacqua ’07, Assistant Professor and Forensic Anthropology Program Coordinator at Western Carolina University, Culhowee, North Carolina
- Dr. Alex Klales ’09, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas
- Dr. Erin Chapman ’06, forensic anthropologist for the Erie County, New York, Medical Examiner’s Office in Buffalo
- Dr. Sara Getz ’11, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Idaho State, Pocatello, Idaho
- Diana Messer ’13M, Forensic Anthropologist for SNA International in support of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) in Hawaii
- Christopher Rainwater ’06M, Forensic Anthropologist in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of the City of New York.

Four of the alumni (Hefner, Passalacqua, Klales and Stull) have also already attained board certification within the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the highest status in the field of forensic anthropology.

“When our students graduate, our primary goal is that they have a significant impact and become leaders in their chosen disciplines;” said Mercyhurst Provost Dr. Leanne Roberts. “Having alumni return to campus to share their expertise and wisdom gained from time spent in the profession after graduation is truly a privilege.”
Single collegiate moms

University offers merciful new beginnings

By Mary Solberg • Reprinted with permission from the March issue of Faith, the magazine of the Erie Catholic Diocese

College life is more than 8 a.m. classes, research papers and exams for four women enrolled at Mercyhurst University North East in Erie County.

It also means studying well past midnight after they’ve fed their rambunctious toddlers, read them books and tucked them in for the night. The scenario is repeated most days, amid the usual runny noses and occasional tantrums.

For these single collegiate moms, responsibilities don’t end there. Most also hold down a part-time job to pay the bills.

But mercy has come to the aid of students Jasmine Butcher, Daijah Campbell, Quanshay Carroll and Jennifer White. All have been accepted into a new Women With Children program offered at Mercyhurst North East, a two-year Catholic liberal arts satellite campus of Erie’s Mercyhurst University.

The groundbreaking program’s biggest perks are rent-free housing on campus, including free utilities, laundry services, cable and internet service.

All of the women agree that the daily chaos and worries of attending college and raising children – on a single income at or near the poverty level – are more bearable now.

“It’s been a blessing on top of a blessing,” says Quanshay Carroll, 23, who entered the program in January with her 4-year-old daughter, Delaysia.

The words “blessed” and “grateful” come up frequently during a recent talk with the women at the school’s Matthew L. Ryan Student Union. They watch as Delaysia, a newcomer to the program, plays with Jasmine’s daughter, Noella, 2; and Daijah’s daughters, Dallas, 2, and Dasani, 4. White’s 2-year-old son, William, isn’t present that night, but subsequent get-togethers quickly include the only boy in the group.

“I’m more relaxed now,” says Jasmine, who, at 22, is the youngest of the mothers. “I’m happier. I’m not stressed out.”

A growing demographic

Stress can impede growth on many fronts, both physically and mentally.

A 2018 paper released by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research found that single mothers who attend college full time spend nine hours a day on child care and housework.

“Single mothers in college are doing double and triple duty to make a better life for their families, but too few have the support needed to juggle the competing demands of college, parenthood and employment,” according to Lindsey Reichlin Cruse, the institute’s current study director who was quoted in Diverse: Issues in Higher Education, a publication of the College Media Association.

But single moms – including those at Mercyhurst North East – are not alone. U.S. Census Bureau statistics released in 2016 found that children living with a single mother make up the second most common family arrangement in the U.S. That’s nearly triple the percentage of children living with single moms in 1960.

These facts, and a plethora of others, are of increasing interest to colleges and universities.

More than one-quarter of all undergraduate students in America are raising children while attending college, according to the Best Colleges website. Single moms, it finds, make up 43 percent of the student-parent population, while single fathers comprise 11 percent.

About three years ago, Mercyhurst University President Michael Victor became intrigued by the concept of a Women With Children program while at the Conference for Mercy Higher Education in Washington, D.C.

Misericordia University, a private Catholic liberal arts university in Dallas, Pennsylvania, and the College of Saint Mary in Omaha, Nebraska, both founded by the Sisters of Mercy, offer similar single-mother programs. Victor proposed the idea for Mercyhurst North East, which has a current enrollment of 660.

“It goes right back to the critical concerns of the Sisters of Mercy, which is to battle poverty through education,” Victor says. “What we believe is that this is the path to break the cycle of poverty, if we give them an opportunity to do well, the children will do well.”

Mercy Sister JoAnne Courneen, a member of the board of trustees, visited Misericordia and two other institutions to learn about their programs. She and Jackie Fink, the director of administrative services at the North East campus, also conducted more research about its benefits and challenges, including ensuring the safety of children on a college campus.

The benefits of the Women With Children program were so evident that Mercyhurst fast-tracked it and welcomed the first cohort last fall.

Fink believes Mercyhurst is now among only a handful of universities nationwide that offer year-round, free on-campus housing for single mothers.
Yet, according to BestColleges.com, there are several more, specifically 20, that are reshaping education by offering programs for single parents, both moms and dads.

At North East, the four student-moms and their children share connecting townhouses at the northern edge of campus, only a short walk to the school’s Ridge Library.

“This speaks to what the word ‘mercy’ means,” Sister JoAnne says. “It means going beyond charity to improving quality of life. We’re really empowering them; we’re not taking care of them.”

Painful stories turn hopeful

If you ask Daijah Campbell’s 4-year-old daughter, Dasani, what she thinks of living with her mom on a college campus, she shouts one simple response: “Great!”

“And what’s your mom studying?” she’s asked.

“How does your mom study?” Dasani says.

For toddlers, it doesn’t get any simpler than that. Yet, the moms enrolled in Mercyhurst’s Women With Children program have much more complicated lives and responsibilities.

Each of them was admitted to the program because they were living at or near the poverty level. Only single mothers with up to two children, between the ages of 2 and 10, are eligible.

Daijah, Jasmine, Quanshay and Jennifer all share strikingly similar stories. All of them were attending college or some other post-secondary certification/training program when they became pregnant by a boyfriend.

All of them were forced because of finances and resources to discontinue their education. It was, as Jennifer aptly describes it, a “mostly difficult” time. Quanshay, who was attending Pittsburgh’s Carlow University, calls having to quit school “devastating.”

None of them married their children’s fathers, but all of the kids are in touch with their dads in one way or another, either through occasional face-to-face visits or via cell phone.

Each mom also has depended heavily the past few years on family – either parents, grandparents or aunts – to help them with baby-sitting, car rides and emotional support. While housing had been one of the biggest stressors in their lives, it also motivated them to move on.

Daijah, at one time, was working and living in Erie, paying $750 a month for an apartment. She lost her job, forcing her and her two daughters to return to her grandmother’s home.

Quanshay was living with her mother in Erie, but the “racket” created by her younger brother and sister, along with her own needy child, wasn’t conducive to studying.

Jasmine’s parents’ house in Crawford County was old and filled with cigarette smoke. Little Noella made about four trips to the hospital last year for asthma-related issues.

Jennifer, at 33 the oldest of the moms, was paying $500 per month for an apartment in North East. She knew she had to break the cycle of poverty and uncertainty.

They all applied and were accepted to Mercyhurst North East, and all of them have chosen health-related majors, merciful in their own right. Jennifer is majoring in health studies, Quanshay and Daijah are in the licensed practical nurse program, and Jasmine is studying for her registered nurse degree.

Says Daijah: “A lot of mothers already feel that we’re caring and nurturing. We already have some of those qualities that nurses have.”

Jackie Fink, who now also serves as the Women With Children program director, meets regularly with each of the moms. She ensures the institutional safety of their children and that the women take advantage of all the benefits of the program, including family enrichment classes, individual goal planning sessions, academic support, career services, on-campus counseling, and parenting and information workshops.

Erie Dawn, a local advocacy agency for women in transition, partners with the program to provide assistance to the mothers on an as-needed basis. Nearby St. Gregory School has opened its doors to any of the children eligible for its preschool and elementary programs, but at this time the women have secured day-care services elsewhere.

“This program is going to take these women into new career paths in which they’ll be independent and good providers for their families,” Fink says.

According to Jasmine, the Women With Children program bypasses any negative judgment of single moms.

“Some people wouldn’t look so positive on a single mother, but Mercyhurst took that thought and completely turned it around so that we can be productive and successful,” Jasmine says. “I don’t know if I’d still be coming to school if I wasn’t in this program. I don’t know that I would be able to afford gas for my car.”

It also has bolstered self-confidence and instilled an enduring hope for the future.

“I have no thought about going backwards now,” Jennifer adds. “I just want to give my son a good life.”

Update:

Program Director Jackie Fink reports that the four women highlighted in this story are doing well academically and making progress toward their degrees. The Women With Children program is at capacity for the fall semester, however, Fink maintains a waiting list for interested families. Visit northeast.mercyhurst.edu/women-with-children to learn more.
Happenings at the Hurst

Spadafor gift to benefit music department

Erie native Christine Spadafor, an accomplished executive whose extensive career experience ranges from corporate board rooms to nonprofits, announced a generous gift this spring that will benefit Mercyhurst’s D’Angelo Department of Music.

Spadafor, who also spoke at Mercyhurst’s 91st Commencement on May 12, chose to name the gift in honor of her late mother, Mary – a tribute to her mother’s lifelong love of music, as well as her commitment to community service.

The Mary A. Spadafor Endowed Chair of Music will support the salary, professional development, expenses and other scholarly activities of the chair of the Mercyhurst Music Department, a position currently held by Nathan Hess. The Mary Pellegrino Spadafor Scholarship for Voice Performance is merit-based and will help with activities like internships, music festival study, and graduate school auditions. The inaugural scholarship recipient is senior Lydia Bolin of Orono, Maine. Both endowments will be administered by the Erie Community Foundation.

Although neither Spadafor nor members of her family are Mercyhurst alumni, Spadafor said they are well aware of Mercyhurst’s acclaimed music program as well as the university’s overarching commitment to arts and culture.

“These gifts are endowments because we seek to make more than a momentary gesture,” she said. “Rather, we desire that mom’s generosity and kindness to others be carried forward in perpetuity.”

She made the same point when she addressed the Class of 2019. Spadafor challenged students to balance external success with the more internal rewards of purpose, meaning and giving back to others.

Dance studio renamed to honor Tauna Hunter

Studio B in the Zurn Hall danceSpace has been renamed the Hunter Studio in honor of Tauna Hunter, who retired this spring after a 25-year career with Mercyhurst’s Dance Department.

Mercyhurst Trustees approved the honor at their Feb. 16 meeting and the dedication took place May 9, after Hunter and husband Michael Gleason, also a Mercyhurst dance professor, returned from spending the final weeks of spring semester with dance students at Mercyhurst’s campus in Dungarvan, Ireland.

During the dedication, President Michael T. Victor called the program Hunter developed “a signature Mercyhurst program of national acclaim.”

He added, “If you look at the qualities inherent in a professional dancer, you realize that many of them are what we hope all our students cultivate while in college: perseverance, stamina, motivation and discipline, creativity and resilience, and the ability to interpret and communicate stories. And Tauna represents the kind of teacher that Mercyhurst prides itself in: personal, creative, transformative.”

Hunter chaired the dance department for 24 years before stepping down from the post last year in anticipation of her retirement.

The May event capped a year full of tributes for Hunter. In November 2018, she accepted a Lifetime Achievement Award from Erie Arts & Culture.

And in January, dozens of her former students from all over the country returned to Erie for a surprise retirement celebration, and “one last class” with their beloved mentor.
Seniors fund Living the Dream Scholarship

When members of the Class of 2019 arrived on campus in August of 2015, their orientation featured a presentation by motivational speaker Curtis Zimmerman.

Zimmerman has been a regular at Mercyhurst orientations for more than decade. Drawing from his own career in the entertainment industry, Zimmerman urges students to position their lives as performances: you define your character, write your script, and cast your show wisely to live your dream.

During graduation weekend in May, Zimmerman was back at Mercyhurst to witness the impact of his words as seniors presented President Michael T. Victor with a check for $15,099.78 to fund the newly created Living the Dream Scholarship.

"Living the dream is helping others to live the dream and you are doing just that with this scholarship," Zimmerman told the students. The scholarship will assist with tuition costs for a student who is pursuing an internship or career experience.

Alumnus and Trustee Lev Kubiak had agreed to match the money raised by the students up to $10,000, creating an endowed scholarship that will benefit students indefinitely. He made a similar matching gift last year to help the Class of 2018 create an endowed scholarship honoring Sister Lisa Mary McCartney, RSM.

"It is amazing how these students have had the ability to pull together with relatively limited resources and raise this amount of money for a scholarship," said Kubiak. "I am both happy and honored to have been asked by President Victor to help enable this opportunity and I look forward to seeing the connection these students maintain with the university in the years to come."

Class of ’69 creates endowed scholarship

The Class of 1969 celebrated its 50th anniversary during Reunion Weekend in June. Class members presented President Michael T. Victor with a check for $25,000 to establish the Class of 1969 Endowed Scholarship.

On hand for the gathering were (seated from left) Emily Fatica Sertz, Patti Sullivan, Bonnie DeLuca Faulkner, Kathleen Kelley Smith, Louise Tavinello, Meda Mitchell Lee, and Bernadette Fill Krehnovi; (standing from left), Kathy Cermak Polito, Mary Sroka Kollin, Lynda Underwood Lefaiver, Catherine Varca, Cheryl Stroup, Mary Ann Morton-Billey, Christine Syguda Bailey, Mary Fisher Yonkers, Marcy Mikulec Galitsky, Lynn Varricchio, Ann Brugger Schoeller, Rosalie Hodas Tellers, Teri Zupsic Reese, Camille Delucia Matthews, and Sylvia D'Aurora Reising.
Former hockey All-American Kristen Cameron graduates from Mercyhurst

It’s been nearly a decade since former 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 the use of her arms.

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 since 2016; she’s learned to drive a car; she’s a sought-after motivational speaker and 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 realized her dream and graduated from Mercyhurst University with a master’s degree in Organizational Leadership.

Program director Dr. Anne Zaphiris said Cameron earned her degree through online and correspondence classes, achieving a 3.9 GPA. She received the Sister Eustace Taylor Award for Excellence in Organizational Leadership at this year’s Honors Convocation.

Said Zaphiris, “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.”

Dr. Anne Zaphiris, Kristen Cameron, President Michael T. Victor

MIAC announces blockbuster 2019-20 season

The Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center will host a spectacular lineup of world-class talent during the Mercyhurst Institute for Arts & Culture’s 2019-20 MIAC Live season. Director Brett D. Johnson, Ph.D., said the Institute’s eclectic roster of offerings promises something for everyone, from Broadway to Hollywood, world music to country and folk, and comic ballet to observational humor.

Johnson noted that all Live performances during the past two seasons have sold out, and he expects that trend to continue.

The 2019-20 season begins Thursday, Sept. 19, when Broadway superstar Kristin Chenoweth presents an evening of popular standards from Broadway, Hollywood and beyond.

The season will also feature:

- Oct. 18 – author David Sedaris
- Nov. 2 – singer/songwriter Rufus Wainwright
- Nov. 14 – country superstar Rosanne Cash
- Dec. 2 – Australian ensemble The TEN Tenors
- Feb. 11 – Yamato: The Drummers of Japan
- March 3 – comic ballet troupe Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo
- April 1 – Broadway leading man Brian Stokes Mitchell
- April 16 – legendary actress Glenn Close

Visit miac.mercyhurst.edu or call the box office at 814-824-3000 to check ticket availability.

The 2019-20 MIAC Live series is made possible through the generosity of Scott Enterprises, Dr. & Mrs. Robert Guelcher, Aetna, and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority.

Mercyhurst named PA’s second Purple Heart University

Mercyhurst – long known as a military-friendly institution and home to more than 50 student-veterans – has been designated as a Purple Heart University, making it only the second college in Pennsylvania to receive the honor from the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH).

The award recognizes Mercyhurst’s commitment to MOPH’s primary goal to provide services to veterans and their families; more specifically, veterans who were wounded in combat while serving their country and are now pursuing their higher education careers at Mercyhurst.

More than a dozen area Purple Heart recipients were on hand when Mercyhurst President Michael Victor made the designation official at a ceremony that kicked off the campus celebration of Veterans Day. They included Cody Harrington, Mercyhurst’s only Purple Heart recipient; Ryan Burniston, husband of faculty member Dr. Amy Burniston; and alumnus Scott Miller.
Jim Snyder receives Teaching Excellence Award

Calling him a “teacher in the model of the best,” Mercyhurst University has chosen Philosophy Department Chair James Snyder, Ph.D., as the 2019 recipient of its Teaching Excellence Award.

Provost Dr. Leanne M. Roberts noted that his colleagues describe Snyder as a scholar with a brilliant mind, a thoughtful and gentle human when interacting with all living things, and a man who loves the discipline of Philosophy. “Taking these in sum, it is no surprise Dr. Snyder was chosen for this award. He is most deserving and we are fortunate he has made Mercyhurst his home for the past 18 years.”

He teaches and has created courses both for the liberal arts core curriculum and Philosophy major, as well as tutorials, interdisciplinary classes, Honors classes, and courses designed for Faculty-led Study Abroad Trips. His contributions to Mercyhurst include serving as department chair and on a variety of university committees.

Snyder has contributed to a vast range of publications and presentations during his Mercyhurst career. This summer, he attended a prestigious Council of Independent Colleges seminar on the Ancient Greek Hero at Harvard University’s Center for Hellenistic Studies, which is designed to increase and expand student engagement with the literature of ancient Greece.

Associate provost appointed

John Olszowka, Ph.D., has been named associate provost for Graduate Programming & Strategic Academic Initiatives.

He’ll serve as the academic leader for Mercyhurst’s graduate programs; work with Provost’s Council on program development and administration; and collaborate with the Office of Graduate Enrollment to scale graduate and professional programs. He’ll help to establish corporate and professional education opportunities that focus on industry and market demands, and will facilitate innovative non-degree programming.

Olszowka is a 14-year veteran and former chair of the Thomas B. Hagen History Department and most recently served as associate dean of the Haffenmaier College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

In Memoriam

The Mercyhurst community continues to mourn the deaths of two beloved faculty members in recent months.

Dr. Karen Christensen Williams, Professor of Spanish, passed away April 27 from complications due to cancer. She was a dedicated and well-respected teacher of Spanish, linguistics, and culture for 23 years. Karen co-wrote a text, *Human Communication Across Cultures*, which reflected her years of teaching sociolinguistics at Mercyhurst, where students learned tolerance for our linguistic and cultural differences.

During a memorial service on campus on May 6, Dr. Alice Edwards said of her colleague, “After 23 years, Karen left a legacy all over the country and the world: from Alaska, Indiana, and New York City, to Spain, Italy, and Vietnam; students who are now teachers, professors, artists, soldiers, and chefs have sent their condolences and remember Karen as a gentle but challenging mentor and inspirational teacher.”

Thomas Kitchen, Assistant Professor of Special Education and Applied Disability Studies, passed away on July 5.

He was a two-time Mercyhurst graduate who returned to our campus in 2010 as a dedicated teacher who pioneered online learning in the Department of Education. His research was widely published and highly regarded in the fields of Special Education and Applied Behavior Analysis. He was a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst whose expertise was sought by schools and agencies for work with complex cases and team training. He will be remembered as a caring clinician, a dedicated teacher, and a valued colleague in his department.

An on-campus memorial service will be held this fall.
Major construction highlights busy summer for Athletics

Laker for Life Campaign off to exciting start

It has been quite the year for Athletics at Mercyhurst.

On the field, eight programs advanced to the NCAA Tournament, fueled by historic runs for men’s basketball, men’s rowing and baseball. In the classroom, Mercyhurst’s 627 student-athletes averaged a 3.27 grade-point average, with 23 of 24 programs recording a 3.0 GPA or better. This fall, Mercyhurst’s student-athletes will take the field wearing Under Armour uniforms, after a multi-year partnership was signed in January.

But the most significant accomplishment in athletics is the Laker for Life Campaign and the major construction happening on campus this summer and fall.

The campaign begins

Designed to give the athletic facilities a much-needed upgrade, the Laker for Life Campaign was officially unveiled in February.

To kick-start the campaign, William and Betsy Vorsheck donated $4 million, the largest alumni gift in school history. Mercyhurst Trustee and Athletic Campaign Chair John Saxon gifted an additional $1 million toward the campaign. To date, the campaign has raised upwards of $6.5 million.

“We are extraordinarily grateful to Bill and Betsy Vorsheck and John and Patty Saxon for making an investment that will heighten the athletics experience for our fans and student-athletes and further enhance the Carpe Diem spirit that is signature Mercyhurst,” said President Michael T. Victor.

When the campaign is completed, it will be a game-changer for all student-athletes, as every on-campus athletic facility will be improved.

“The launch of the Laker for Life Campaign signifies a new direction and vision for Mercyhurst Athletics,” said Director of Athletics Brad Davis. “Because of the commitment to athletics from President Victor, Mercyhurst will transform its athletic programs and facilities and significantly enhance the student-athlete experience.”

Phase 1 projects to be completed by Spring 2020

Construction began in April with renovations to the Mercyhurst Ice Center and will continue through the fall and spring on a number of projects. Features of Phase 1 construction include:

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The William Vorsheck Jr. Athletic Complex and Saxon Stadium Upgrades

The newly named Saxon Stadium got some big upgrades this summer, including a new synthetic turf surface for football, lacrosse, and field hockey, as well as new LED lighting.

The baseball/soccer field also got a new synthetic surface, plus a new backstop, seating area, scoreboard and bullpens.

A third turf field is tentatively scheduled for completion in spring 2020 as Mercyhurst University and Mercyhurst Prep partner on a brand-new facility on the hill next to the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse.

The field, which will be lighted, will bring the softball program to campus for the first time in school history. It will also provide flexibility for soccer, lacrosse and field hockey to hold games and practices, and allow for additional club sport and intramural programming.

The Mercyhurst Ice Center

The cooling system at the Mercyhurst Ice Center was upgraded for the first time since it was built in 1991. New dasher boards, glass, and flooring will also improve the playing and spectator experience.

The ice center’s walls and roof got a new coat of paint, and the Zamboni area tripled in size, allowing use of a second Zamboni on game nights and providing much-needed storage.

Locker room facilities

Four additional locker rooms were constructed at the back of the ice center. Two will provide new homes for women’s soccer and softball, while the other two will improve the experience for local youth leagues and visiting teams that use the ice center.

What’s Next?

Future projects are tied directly to the success of the Laker for Life Campaign and may include:

• A major overhaul of the Mercyhurst Athletic Center, including a new and expanded gym floor, removal of the facility’s stage, seating renovations, and new scoreboards to help the basketball, wrestling and volleyball programs

• Expanded VIP space and luxury suites in the ice center, as well as an enlarged press box and new chairback seats to replace the bleachers

• Improvements to the Fitness and Recreation Center

• Improvements for the men’s and women’s rowing programs, including upgrades to the tanks for winter training and a new locker room

To support the Laker for Life Campaign, please visit mercyhurst.edu/LakerforLife for more information.
Men’s basketball wins first regional championship, advances to NCAA Elite Eight

It was a season to remember for the Mercyhurst men’s basketball team. Head Coach Gary Manchel’s squad set a school record for wins with 26, while capturing its first regional championship and advancing to the NCAA Elite Eight in Evansville, Indiana, for the first time.

With leadership from Pat Smith and Brown University transfer Jason Massey, the Lakers started the season 7-1 and went 14-2 at home. There were many memorable victories along the way, including becoming the only team to defeat IUP on its home court behind a game-winning 3-pointer from Trystan Pratapas on Feb. 2.

Mercyhurst stormed through the PSAC Conference Tournament, defeating Seton Hill at home in the first round, knocking off Slippery Rock on the road in the quarterfinals and East Stroudsburg in the semifinals, before falling to IUP in the Conference Championship.

But the Lakers earned the No. 4 seed in the NCAA Atlantic Regional and defeated Fairmont State 63-60 in overtime in the first round on a game-winning 3-pointer from Smith. The next night, the Lakers downed No. 2 IUP on its home court once again, 75-65, before capturing the Regional Championship with an 82-70 victory over No. 5 West Liberty, behind stellar floor leadership from Derrick Ellis Jr. Smith was named All-Tournament MVP for his efforts.

Mercyhurst fell 55-51 to undefeated Northwest Missouri State in the Elite Eight, but the Lakers came as close as anyone to beating the eventual national champion.

The City of Erie rallied behind Mercyhurst, as Mayor Joe Schember congratulated the team in person on April 4 at City Hall, while the Lakers threw out the first pitch at an Erie SeaWolves baseball game later in the month.

Owen McCormick makes significant donation to Laker for Life Campaign and basketball programs

Erie businessman and philanthropist Owen J. McCormick has made a significant financial gift to Laker for Life – The Campaign for Mercyhurst Athletics, and specifically the Mercyhurst basketball programs.

“I have known Owen McCormick as a businessman, a former Mercyhurst trustee, and personal friend for many years,” said President Michael T. Victor. “We are most grateful for his continued generosity toward Mercyhurst, the most recent of which will go a long way toward enhancing the overall athletic experience at the university.”

The owner of the Erie BayHawks, McCormick’s passion for basketball is well-known in the Erie community. As part of the athletics campaign, the university will rename its court the Owen J. McCormick Basketball Court.

“I’m extremely grateful to Mercyhurst for all that it has done for generations of students and for the many ways in which it has contributed to the Erie community,” McCormick said. “I’m particularly supportive of the great job that President (Michael) Victor is doing. I have a deep respect for him as a businessman and as a personal friend.”

Pat Smith has memorable year on and off the court

Pat Smith became a Mercyhurst sensation for more reasons than just basketball this year. The 28-year-old Navy veteran was the NCAA Atlantic Regional MVP, leading Mercyhurst to its first Elite Eight appearance.

But that’s just where Smith’s story begins.

Smith sang the lead in Mercyhurst’s spring opera production of Don Pasquale, and he was honored with the Catherine McAuley Adult Student Award at commencement. Finally, Smith, a Maryland native, sang the National Anthem at the Baltimore Orioles-New York Yankees game at Baltimore’s Oriole Park at Camden Yards on May 22 thanks to a little help from Kristen Hudak ’05, director of public relations for the Orioles.
Brooklyn Kohlheim named head women’s basketball coach

Director of Athletics Brad Davis named Brooklyn Kohlheim as Mercyhurst’s new head women’s basketball coach in April.

“The moment you walk on campus,” said Kohlheim, “the word that comes into my mind is ‘enchanting.’ It is a very special place and the culture that everybody has bought into and built around here is felt by every visitor.”

Kohlheim was the head coach at Lake Erie College in 2018-19. She has been an assistant coach at Michigan Tech, Nova Southeastern and Indianapolis and has been a part of five NCAA Tournament teams, three Conference Champions, two Elite Eight appearances, and one Final Four in nine years.

Gary Manchel signs long-term contract extension

Following the memorable season, head men’s basketball coach Gary Manchel signed a long-term contract extension.

The 16-year head coach of the Lakers, Manchel guided the program to its first Regional Championship and its third NCAA Tournament appearance, all in the last five years.

“This is special to me,” said Manchel. “I want to thank President Victor for all his support entrusting me with the men’s basketball program. I want to thank Director of Athletics Brad Davis as well. We’ve known each other for just a year, and I can honestly say that I haven’t enjoyed working for somebody as much as him.

“When I think of Mercyhurst, I don’t think of a place that I have to go to work. I think I am going to see my family.”

Manchel reached the 400-win plateau in January, while his 2018-19 team ranked second in the country in defense. Mercyhurst has ranked in the Top 10 in defense in six of the last seven years.

Baseball advances to College World Series Final Four for first time

The Mercyhurst baseball program has become the preeminent Division II program in the Atlantic and Northeast regions.

Led by ABCA Atlantic Region Coach of the Year Joe Spano, the Lakers advanced to the College World Series for the second straight year, and the third time in five seasons. After winning one game in their last two World Series appearances, these Lakers reached uncharted territory, earning two victories over Catawba and UC San Diego and becoming one of four teams remaining in the country.

Mercyhurst’s pitching staff led the way as two of its seniors, Tyler Garbee and Matt Minnick, were selected in the MLB Draft. Garbee went to Cincinnati in the 19th round, while Minnick, the Atlantic Region and PSAC Pitcher of the Year, was drafted by his hometown team, the New York Yankees, in the 23rd round.
In September 2018, Attorney Richard Lanzillo was named a United States Magistrate Judge for the U.S. District Court, Western District of Pennsylvania.

"Serving as a judge is the highest calling of the law, at least for me," he said. The appointment opened an exciting new chapter in his legal career of 30-plus years, but also required a change in his relationship with Mercyhurst.

He had to resign from the Mercyhurst Board of Trustees, which he joined in 2003 and had chaired since 2016. He’s already noticed the void left by his work for his alma mater.

“I miss it terribly,” he says. “I’m looking for ways to stay connected within the bounds of my ethical and professional obligations.”

Rich enrolled at Mercyhurst in 1979 and his leadership skills were on display early. He quickly got involved with Mercyhurst Student Government and served two terms as MSG president.

“Those roles were great learning opportunities,” he says now. He mastered everything from budgeting to working with committees. He worked to increase student involvement in the governance of Mercyhurst, and of course to help improve campus life.

Today’s Spring Fest can probably trace its origins to the Spring Weekend he helped institute.

He laughingly recalls some off-the-wall student events, from hospital gurney races around Zurn Hall to the time he hired a plane and dumped 1,000 numbered ping pong balls over the baseball field for students to find winning numbers for big-ticket prizes.

On the more serious side, he recalls helping develop a campus lecture series. His favorite speaker was Doris Kearns, who spoke on presidential politics in 1980.

Thirty-six years later, the Jefferson Educational Society brought Kearns (now Doris Kearns Goodwin and a world-renowned presidential historian) back to Erie and Rich introduced her a second time.

Rich was the obvious choice for the Carpe Diem Award when he graduated in 1983.

Though he had laughed at first when his history professors suggested he consider law school, he took their advice. After a year off to put some money aside, he enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law.

“It was very intimidating at first,” he admits. But he soon realized he was well-equipped to succeed. “I was pleased to note how well the analytical thinking skills emphasized at Mercyhurst in general, and in the history program in particular, translated to legal reasoning and critical thinking, which are essential to the study of law.” Mercyhurst’s emphasis on writing also served him well, he says.

He especially enjoyed constitutional law and contract law. Chosen to write for Pitt’s Law Review, he went on to become one of its editors. He graduated summa cum laude.

Rich had met Jo-Ann Israel ‘86 at Mercyhurst, but they lost track of each other after he graduated. They met again when she visited Pitt Law as a potential student, and were engaged during his final year at Pitt.

After working a year with a prominent Phoenix firm, Rich and Jo-Ann decided to return to Erie, which both had grown to love during their college days.

One of Rich’s first calls was to Attorney William Sennett, then the chair of Mercyhurst’s Board of Trustees and a partner at Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett. He’d admired Sennett when – as president of Mercyhurst Student Government – he had a seat on the board.

He accepted the offered position and remained with the Knox firm for more than 30 years, working primarily on complex commercial, employment and civil rights litigation. He also served as a mediator and neutral evaluator in the Court’s Alternative Dispute Resolution Program.

In 2003, Attorney Sennett encouraged Rich to become a Mercyhurst trustee himself. He says it was “breathtaking” to realize how much the school had grown in the 20 years since his graduation. “I was really pleased to see how Mercyhurst had reacted to changing times and developed programs that would fit students’ needs,” he says. He relished the opportunity to continue that work, and was active in many board committees during his tenure.

He eventually became the vice chair and chair of the board and co-chaired the search committee that recommended President Michael Victor’s appointment.

Jo-Ann ultimately decided against law school. “It’s a shame – she would have been a better lawyer than I,” Rich adds with his usual modesty. Instead, after working in career services at Mercyhurst, she pursued her teaching certification. She’s been teaching for more than 20 years at Asbury Elementary School near Erie. They have two daughters, Amanda and Eliza, both now pursuing Ph.D.s.

Rich has been active with the Erie County Bar Association (serving as president in 2015) and with Attorneys & Kids Together, which matches Erie lawyers with disadvantaged kids. He and Jo-Ann worked together to mentor two young sisters for more than six years. They still remain in touch.

Now happily settled into a comfortable office on the second floor of Erie’s Federal Courthouse, Rich expects to handle largely civil cases that fall under federal jurisdiction, from civil rights and constitutional claims to contracts and commercial cases, as well as preliminary criminal matters. United States Magistrate Judges are appointed by the federal District Justices following a merit selection process. “I plan on doing this job until they kick me out,” he laughs.
Distinguished Alumni recognized during Reunion Weekend

Mercyhurst University presented its highest alumni award – the Sister Carolyn Herrmann Award – to the Honorable Richard A. Lanzillo during its 10th annual Reunion Weekend in June. (See story at left). Five other Distinguished Alumni were also recognized for their outstanding achievements in their careers or for their service to the community.

Gary Calabrese ’79 went on to earn another bachelor’s degree in physical therapy from Cleveland State University and a doctorate from the University of Montana. He’s now the Senior Director for Sports Health and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation at the Cleveland Clinic, where he supervises more than 900 employees and facilities around the world. He has worked with all of Cleveland’s major league teams, including 22 years as team physical therapist with the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Stephen Callaghan ’79 had a 20-year career as a naval aviator, retiring as a Commander, and earned a master’s degree in national security and strategic studies from the Naval War College. He later joined Lockheed-Martin Corporation and directed its F-35 and Naval Aviation Programs. Following a stint with Sikorsky Aircraft, in April he returned to Lockheed-Martin Aeronautics, where he’s now in charge of business development for the F-35 Program.

Suki Fuller ’05 has been a competitive intelligence advisor in the automotive, pharmaceutical, technology, and defense industries, and founded her own business, Miribure. Since 2015, she has become known for her work mentoring entrepreneurs, including many women, in the fast-growing tech industry. She has recently entered the venture capital field as co-founder and CEO of Salaam Ventures, and continues to be a noted public speaker and trainer.

Nalika Nanayakkara ’94 earned her MBA in finance and management from Columbia University. After positions with Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi and Capgemini, she joined EY (formerly known as Ernst & Young) in 2011. A principal, she leads the wealth and asset management practice out of the New York office. She has written articles for a variety of respected publications in the finance industry, and is frequently quoted as an expert by financial media.

Maria Figurski Wells ’06 has dealt with a series of critical health challenges over the past several years, but went on to create Mama Mia’s BOWtique, a unique children’s store that she uses as a platform to help children suffering from illness. Despite her own health challenges, she has raised more than $30,000 in the last eight months alone to help families dealing with blindness, paralysis, brain cancer, severe heart issues, and more.
The national champion 2011 men's lacrosse team

Emily Warren Zimmer '10 Breanna Haggerty Bertolini '09 Ian Wild '12

Hall of Fame inducts 3 athletes, 2011 men’s lacrosse team

During Reunion Weekend festivities in June, the Mercyhurst Athletic Hall of Fame inducted the entire 2011 national championship men's lacrosse team, as well as lacrosse player Breanna Haggerty Bertolini '09; field hockey player Emily Warren Zimmer '10; and football and lacrosse player Ian Wild '12.

The 2011 men's lacrosse team earned an at-large bid to the sport's national tournament, where the Lakers beat C.W. Post, the two-time defending national champion, by a 14-4 margin, and then beat Adelphi to claim Mercyhurst's first national title in a field sport. Chris Ryan has coached men's lacrosse since 2000.

Breanna Haggerty Bertolini played lacrosse from 2006 to 2009. She holds the school record for career goals with 241 and career points with 341. Her 75-goal season in 2008 is the program’s single-season record. She was a First-Team All-American in both her junior and senior years. She now works as a freelance graphic designer and publishes a popular blog called “brepurposed,” about her love for repurposing things and giving new life to the old.

Emily Warren Zimmer was a perennial MVP in field hockey from 2006 to 2009. She holds program records for career goals (40) and points (97), and is tied for the assists record (17). She earned First-Team All-America honors in 2009, as well as a pair of Second-Team awards.

She now works with students with disabilities at Buffalo’s McKinley High School and coaches for the Amherst High School JV team and the Buffalo Hurricanes club team.

Ian Wild helped the Laker football team earn its first PSAC championship and first appearance (and first victory) in the NCAA tournament in fall 2010. In spring 2011 he was a key factor as men's lacrosse won its first national championship. He was the tourney MVP and also earned the NCAA's Elite 88 academic award. He has played in both the NFL preseason and the Canadian Football League, this season with the Toronto Argonauts. He’s a Certified Financial Planner and a financial advisor in the Pittsburgh office of HBKS Wealth Advisors.
Class Notes

The ’60s

Kathleen Lynch Murphy, Ph.D.’63 and her husband, Robert M. Murphy, Ph.D., are authors of a book published in the 2018 Routledge Focus series: Manager vs. Leader: Untying the Gordian Knot. The book differentiates the terms manager and leader and helps align one’s expectations from these individuals.

Dr. Alicia King Redfern ’70 was elected and installed as the 82nd president of Pennsylvania State Chapter of P.E.O. Sisterhood, a philanthropic, educational organization. She is the first African American president of the PA State Chapter. P.E.O., one of the oldest women’s organizations in North America, celebrates the advancement of women by providing educational opportunities to women through scholarships, grants, awards, loans, and stewardship of Cottey College.

Debbie Flounders Bigelow ’77 recently became the co-CEO (owner) of Project Management Solutions, Inc. (PM Solutions).

The ’70s

Dr. Robert Alan Santos Jr. ’84 wrote and illustrated The PSALM® Cards for Shell. He’ll be responsible for Shell’s employment law function for North America.

Dr. Rev. Walter R. Green ’80 received the Dr. Jesse B. Barber Jr. Community Health Care Award from Unity Health Care in Washington, D.C., where he has worked for 13 years. The award was in recognition of Rev. Green’s “commitment, thoughtfulness and compassion” in working with people who are homeless and his work in addressing “social, environmental, and policy factors” that create poverty and homelessness. In accepting the award, he noted that his experience at Mercyhurst was important in developing his awareness of social justice issues.

Timothy Kosarsky ’80 has completed the 200-hour teacher training and is working on the 300-hour teacher training program from the Yoga Alliance. Tim teaches yoga class for special-needs populations including at-risk young adults, substance abusers, and PTSD victims through his “Soft Place to Land Yoga” practice.

The ’80s


Kim Flick Borczyk ’80 and Ron Borczyk ’80 celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary on Oct. 22, 2018. They began dating in 1979 as students at Mercyhurst.

Robert M. Murphy, Ph.D., is the associate general counsel for Investment Property Exchange Services, Inc. in Chicago. Gail is a senior analyst with the Central States Health and Welfare Fund in Rosemont, Illinois. They honeymooned in Maui, Hawaii, in January 2019. Pierre is pictured with Mercyhurst classmates Mary Cay Marchione Ricci ’82, Laurie Mahnken-John ’82 and Gary Dagan ’82.

Dawn Day-Quinn ’82, a Mercyhurst instructor in Interior Design 1989-92, has published her first novel, Silent Ties is a coming-of-age novel that follows two girls and their families in the harrowing Jim Crow South. You can read Silent Ties online or on Amazon.com, and connect with Dawn and join the discussion at dawndayquinn.com.

Kathleen Lynch Murphy, Ph.D. ’63 and her husband, Robert M. Murphy, Ph.D., are authors of a book published in the 2018 Routledge Focus series: Manager vs. Leader: Untying the Gordian Knot. The book differentiates the terms manager and leader and helps align one’s expectations from these individuals.

The ’90s

Staci Billings Grasky ’91 earned her doctorate in educational leadership from the University of New England in May 2018. Staci works as a grants manager for the Maine Community College System.

Kristine DeMarinis Petersen ’95 presented at the state conference of the Virginia Council for the Social Studies in Roanoke and at the national conference of the National Council for the Social Studies in Chicago. Both presentations focused on combining social studies and reading skills and strategies to create lessons that support literacy across the curriculum.

Michael Eldred ’97 completed his second Ironman at Ironman Lake Placid on July 23, 2018, with a time of 16:44.

Eric Wicks ’98 ’03M was inducted into the Berkshire High School Athletic Hall of Fame in Burton, Ohio, as a three-sport athlete (football, basketball, track). His high school career was highlighted by 1st Team All-Ohio Selection and playing in the Ohio North-South All-Star Football Game. Eric was a four-year starter at Mercyhurst as a placekicker and punter earning All-America honors and selection to the Snow Bowl Division II All-Star Football game.

The ’00s

Brooke Sanfilippo ’00 and Matthew Sanfilippo ’13 had a son, Luciano, on Oct. 21, 2018.

David Leisering ’01 has been named head sports information director at Bloomsburg University after serving in the role on an interim basis.

Daniel Schuch ’01 was named Managing Counsel of North American Labor, Employment and Benefits Law for Shell. He’ll be responsible for Shell’s employment law function for North America.

Shannon Mazzant West ’01 was selected as a Golden Apple Award Winner. She is a 5th grade English and Language Arts teacher at Corry Intermediate School.

Nicole Bonvouloir Zeiders ’01 was nominated for the 2018 Health Care Worker of the Year award, presented each year to an Ohio caregiver who gives back to the community, reflects the mission and values of his or her organization, and routinely goes beyond the call of duty.

Jay Puskar ’02, Communication Department adjunct instructor at Mercyhurst, has been named sports director for WJET/WFXP-TV in Erie.

Peter Cuneo ’03 and wife Jennifer had their second son, Connor, on Nov. 12, 2018.
Robert Daugherty ’03, the chief probation officer for Venango County, Pennsylvania, was honored with the top statewide award at the James E. Anderson Pennsylvania Conference on Juvenile Justice.

Capt. Jeffrey P. Halladay ’03 was promoted from Major to Lieutenant Colonel on July 1, 2019. In May 2020, he will take command of the 215th Brigade Support Battalion 3D Armor Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. He lives in Texas with his wife, Nicole, and kids Lillian (10), Owen (7), and Violet (5).

Rich Johns ’03 has been promoted to associate commissioner of financial management with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the largest municipal housing development agency in the nation.

Katie Krupa Agen ’04 was selected as a New York State Master Teacher in October 2018.

Michelle Costanzo Fitzpatrick ’04 and husband Sean had their second child, son Macklin Joseph, on May 19, 2018.

Michael Marshall ’04 was named vice president for enrollment, marketing and communication at Bellarmine University.

Caitlin Carroll McNulty ’04 and husband Brian had their second child, Molly Margaret, on Aug. 28, 2018, in Buffalo, New York. Molly joins big brother Brennan.

Bethany Shaffer ’04 was named one of 12 league-wide recipients of the Sun Belt Conference’s inaugural Faculty Member of the Year Award. The award recognizes a faculty member from each Sun Belt institution who displays valuable classroom skills such as developing relationships, being a good communicator and showing a passion for teaching, engaging and inspiring students.

Eric Hollenbeck ’05 had two films that he worked on accepted to the 2019 Sundance Film Festival.

Jaime Myers ’05 had a daughter, Aubrey Josephine Outly, on Jan. 19, 2018.

Ted Nagorsen ’05 has been named first assistant coach and recruiting coordinator for Clemson University’s women’s rowing team.

Mary Ellen Leisering ’06 married Reis Ermis on July 28, 2018, in Houston. Mary Ellen started a new job as assistant to the music and ministry department at West U Baptist Church in Houston and her husband is a dispatcher for the local police department.

John Novogurski ’06 and Kristin Cypher ’07 had a son, Bennett Alexander, in January 2017 and a daughter, Madelyn Grace, in March 2018.

Jesse Shelmire ’06 works as a paleontologist with the San Diego Natural History Museum, focusing on Pleistocene megafauna with human occupation in Southern California and Baja, Mexico.

Brian Walker ’06 and Valerie Nezich Walker ’05 had a daughter, Charlotte Helena, on March 8, 2019. She joins big brother Declan.

Chris Aloshen ’07 and Meghan Sauer Aloshen ’07 had a son, Simon Henry, on Jan. 23, 2018, in Ashburn, Virginia. He joins older brother Malcolm Joseph.

Lisa Bannister ’08 was named Teacher of the Year for 2017-2018 at Lake Erie Correctional Institution. Bannister was also named Employee of the Month for April 2017. She teaches Administration Office Technology at the prison and is the first vocational instructor to be honored as Teacher of the Year.

Nicole Rapacki Konieczki ’08 and husband David had their second child, Mila Stephanie, on March 28, 2019, in Erie. Mila joins big sister Eva.

Eileen McGoun Law ’08 and husband Adam had a son, Edward Patrick, on June 6, 2018, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Edward joins big sister Natalie.

Courtney Olevnik ’08 ’13M, who formerly served as director of donor relations, was promoted to director of annual giving at Mercyhurst. In her new role, Courtney’s main responsibilities include oversight of the annual fund’s fiscal and participation goals, stewardship of the Leadership Giving Society and the Loyal Laker program, and management of the matching gifts program.

Kristin Peterson ’08, based in Saskatchewan, Canada, has launched her second children’s book that tells the story of the magic of creativity: Mayva O’Meere, Creators.

Jan Czajkowski ’09 married Katherine Juarez ’08 on Aug. 4, 2018, in Lublin, Poland. Marek Bemach ’09 served as the best man.

Jenna Golden ’09 and husband Eric Bresnehan had a son, Jacob Leon Bresnehan, on Jan. 10, 2019.

The ’10s

Kate Balconi ’10 accepted a new job with Ernst & Young (EY) as an alumni relations manager serving EY alumni of the Southeast region. She’s based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Ryan Browning ’10 and wife Ashley had their first child, daughter Avery Brooke Browning, on June 22, 2018. The family lives in Alexandria, Virginia, and Ryan is pursuing his MBA from the University of Florida while serving as an active duty naval officer.


Bryan J. Meulerski ’10 has been an elementary general music teacher in the Seattle area since moving to Washington State in 2015. In January 2019, he received his Master of Science degree in Curriculum & Instruction from Western Governors University.

Cara Adamus Natalo ’10 and husband Andrew had their first child, daughter Olivia Marie, on May 18, 2018.

Jennifer Pisula ’10 and Pawel Bialk ’10 were married on April 27, 2019, in Wilmington, Delaware. Emily Pisula ’05 and John Bennett ’10 were part of the wedding party. Jennifer works in global sourcing for Anthropologie at the Urban Outfitters Headquarters in Philadelphia, while also teaching part time in the Fashion Merchandising department at Immaculata University. Pawel works as a research scientist at Christiana Care Health Systems in the Gene Editing Institute in Newark, Delaware.

Calleen Farrell ’11 married Patrick Fox ’11 on Sept. 1, 2018, in Rochester, New York. The bridal party included bridesmaids Shannon Farrell Clark ’09, Liz Contrell Baldeleli ’11, Sarah Hricko ’11 and Katie Chandler Nash ’12 and groomsmen Tony Fox ’08 and Brett Sumbrum ’10. They live in Cleveland, Ohio, where Calleen is a marketing communications manager for The Ritz-Carleton and Patrick is a logistics coordinator.
Laura McCarty Waryk ’11 was presented with the “25 Under 35” Award from Saint Joseph Academy. The award acknowledges alumnae who have gone above and beyond in personal and professional endeavors since their graduation from the school. She now works as the creative manager at Saint Joseph Academy.

Hannah Blashock Bozard ’12 was promoted to senior catering sales executive at the Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa.

Haley Bradstreet ’12 married Adam Olzewski ’10 on Sept. 15, 2018, in Stratton, Vermont. Bridesmaids included Anne Marie McKinney ’12 and Isabel Milkovich ’12. Brian Johns ’10 was the officiant and Adam Kessler ’10 was the best man. Haley and Adam live and work in Burlington, Vermont.

Steve Bukowski ’12 accepted a new position as a historical interpreter at the Telfair Museums in Savannah, Georgia. In addition to sharing the history of two historic Savannah homes, he will conduct historical research for the organization.

Lindsay Cox Frank ’12 and Thomas Frank ’13 had a daughter, Sofie, on Dec. 28, 2018.

Sarah Gianadda ’12 married childhood friend Aaron Palinkas in their hometown of Buffalo, New York. Ariana Bielat Elkington ’12 was a bridesmaid. Sarah and Aaron are on to their next big adventure in Barbados where Aaron will begin medical school.

Elizabeth Julius, DC ’12 was elected president of the Northwest Ohio Chiropractic Association (NOCA). Elizabeth owns Chiropractic Associates of Oregon in Oregon, Ohio.

Shannon Kissel ’12 and John-Alex MacDougall ’12 celebrated their first wedding anniversary on July 27, 2018, in Pittsburgh with their close family and friends. The bridal party included Mercyhurst alumni Meghan Hess ’12, Kyle Kallay ’12, Pete Plaskey ’13 and Megan Kissel ’14. Shannon and J.A. were originally married on July 27, 2017, in a small courthouse ceremony. The two live in Pittsburgh where Shannon works as an experience consultant for UPMC, and J.A. is an English teacher and lacrosse coach at Shady Side Academy.

Michael Troutman ’12 married Casey Muna on June 16, 2018, in Dayton, Ohio.

Ryan Bartizal ’13 married Jenna Kormos on Aug. 11, 2018, in Lakewood, Ohio. Groomsmen included Kevin Poropat ’13 and Joe Coyne ’13. Ryan works as a senior analyst for a real estate company in downtown Cleveland and is pursuing his MBA at Cleveland State University.

Shaun Carney ’13 was recently promoted to pilot brewer at BrewDog USA in Canal Winchester, Ohio. He is responsible for brewing all experimental and limited-release beers sold in North America.

Jeremy Dickey ’13 has been named communications manager for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and will oversee the Sisters’ social justice and new membership communications.

Nicholas Eagan ’13 married Maura Hunter ’13 on Sept. 15, 2018, in Pittsburgh. Bridesmaids and groomsmen included Lauren Fraser ’13, Paige Bosnyak ’13, Amber Stilwell ’13, Paul Zucchigna ’13 and Patrick Eagan ’14. Nick and Maura live in Columbus, Ohio. Nick is working on his MBA at The Ohio State University and Maura is working as an art therapist.


Chelsea Morris ’13 has been promoted to museum registrar at the Casemate Museum at Fort Monroe.

Megan Richards ’13 married Clint Schaefer ’14 on May 19, 2018, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Bridesmaids were Rachel Sluberski ’12, Ashley Wiskup Shields ’12, Katherine Erbacher Carter ’12, Morgan Beaty ’14 and Samantha Seigfirth ’14. Groomsmen were Tyler Berger ’14 and Jordan Shields ’13. Clint and Megan live in Buffalo, New York.

John E. Wroblewski ’13 received the Distinguished Faculty Award from Alliance College Alumni Association for his contributions to the betterment of the college and his positive impact on students during his tenure.

Caitlin Ewing ’14 was promoted to senior art director at Belo + Company.

Andrew Klobuchar ’14 married Amanda Marley ’15 on July 7, 2018, in Longmont, Colorado. Andrew is a clinical therapist for Shiloh House. Amanda works as a program specialist for National Veterinary Associates while pursuing her master’s degree in healthcare administration.

Mary Mancuso ’14 married Brendan Michel ’15 on Aug. 11, 2018, in Christ the King Chapel at Mercyhurst. Mary is a lawyer at Jones Day in Cleveland, Ohio, and Brendan is a market intelligence analyst at Palmer Holland in North Olmsted, Ohio. Members of the wedding party included Mercyhurst cross country teammates maid of honor Rebecca Wheeling ’14 and bridesmaids Lauren Shingledecker ’14 and Virginia Kamide ’16.


Chelsey Seelinger Poropat ’14 and Kevin Poropat ’13 had a son, George Matthew, on Nov. 29, 2018.

Kellie Wendell ’14 was named Leader of the Year at Le Meridien Denver Downtown + AC Hotel Denver.

Ashley Margaret Ball ’15 married Andrew Colin Shepherd ’15 on April 6, 2019, in Clifton, Virginia. They met at Egan Dining Hall in 2011.

Gaelin Carrig ’15 was hired by MacDonald, Illig, Jones & Britton LLP as an associate in the Litigation Department. She is a member of the law firm’s Insurance/Personal Injury Practice Group and Commercial/General Litigation Practice Group.


Katyln Heitzhaus ’15 has been promoted to senior accountant at Champsou Travis Besaw & Kershner LLP. She joined the firm as a staff accountant in October 2016.

Jessica Hilburn ’15 published her first book on Aug. 5, 2019, Hidden History of Northwestern Pennsylvania details lesser-known historical stories from Erie, Crawford, Warren and Venango counties and is
published by The History Press. It can be ordered on amazon.com.


Jillian Rycbczynski ’15 married Colton Agro in Buffalo, New York, on Sept. 1, 2018. Allyson Gass ’60 and Jessica Gass ’15 were maids of honor and bridesmaids included Kayla Flynn ’16 and Marissa Kelley ’15.

Mallorie Kaput ’16 and Sara Weindorff Kaput ’16 had a son, Solomon, on June 7, 2018.

Taylor Santiago ’16 accepted a position as company manager at David Beahm Experiences.

Cole Nypaver ’17 authored his first peer-reviewed publication. His work on the formation of small shield volcanos on Venus was published online as part of the Geological Society of America’s Field Volcanology: A Tribute to the Distinguished Career of Don Swanson. It was co-authored with Mercyhurst faculty member Nicholas Lang and Bradley Thomson.

Ryan Danaher ’18 has been hired as an assistant account manager with Pinckney Hugo Group in Syracuse, New York.

Lizzie Manno ’18 currently works in Atlanta as an assistant music editor for Paste Magazine.

Alumni Deaths

Mary Kloecker Featherstone ’43
Janet Fournier Regner ’47
Mary Ann Donaher Hanna ’49
Mary Louise Moore Zeitler ’49
Jean Rosenstiel Buoy ’52
Patricia Miller Schulze ’53
Helen Kennedy Holliday ’56
Mary Kathleen Lawrence Luke ’56
Mary Nowalk Davis ’57
Julia Kelly ’57
Kathleen Franco Muller ’58
Mary Frances Lymph Ayer ’59
Margaret Cummings ’59
Sally Fleckenstein Mastrog ’59
Elaine Schwab ’59
Wanda Toth Snyder ’60
Michelle Corrigan Hittie ’62
Carol Warde Urevick ’63
Delores Waida Bargielski ’64
Sister Catherine Edward Delaney, RSM ’66
Genevieve Mastrian Wiesen ’66
Carol Rzodkiewicz ’70
Patricia Schramm ’72
Linda Gambill Love ’74
Richard Gensheimer Jr. ’76
Kevin Paul Moore ’76
Patricia Lord Ryan ’77
Diane Masterson ’79
Lisa Parlavacchio Salada ’79
Catherine Vilardo Strobl ’81
Russell Wilhelm ’81
Richard Leach ’83
Karen S. Black ’84
Patricia Koehle Hennen ’87
Lillian Dressler ’89
Robert Madia ’93
Mary Wolski ’93
Leon McCormack III ’95
Thomas Kitchen ’97
Peter Russo Jr. ’97
Frank Alberts ’98
Kathleen Clark Anderson ’00
Amber Natali ’02
Adam Lewis ’04
Dennis Blair ’08
John Thearle ’08
Jennifer Gimber ’12

Husband of:
Mary Ann Benetin Golub ’52 (Joseph Golub)
Lynda Rosinski Dei Rossi ’60 (James Dei Rossi)
Patricia Cavanaugh Kirk ’60 (Joseph Kirk). Joseph was also the father of Mark (Kirk) Barber ’84.
Teri Zupsic Reese ’69 (Dennis Reese)
Kathleen Kelley Smith ’69 (Kim Smith)

Father of:
Ann Capoccia Zieno ’74 (Anthony Capoccia)
Linda First Frisina ’81 (Roy First). Roy was also the father-in-law of Stephen Frisina ’80.

Christi Bonadio Gignac ’91 (John Bonadio). John was also the father-in-law of Richard Gignac ’91 and Thomas Dore ’81 and grandfather of Elisha Gnage ’06.

Stepfather of:
Matthew Sanfilippo ’13 (Florindo Fabrizio)

Mother of:
Steven Borowski ’85, Teresa Borowski Taylor ’82 and Nancy Borowski Recker ’76 (Marion Borowski)
Dr. Christine Wiesen Walsh ’89 (Genevieve Wiesen ’66)
Sarah Gravante ’16 (Jimiline Gravante)

Brother of:
Catherine Hornick ’87 (Dr. Joseph Hornick)

Friends of the university:
J. Boyd Bert, Jr., friend of the University
Florindo Fabrizio, former state legislator
Shirley George, long-time Mercyhurst employee
Joseph L. Hepfinger, Athletic Hall of Fame member and loyal Laker fan
Thomas Hertel, former professor at Mercyhurst North East
Myron Jones, Trustee Emeritus
James Lanahan, former Mercyhurst administrator
Helen Meehan, friend of the University
Mary Constance “Connie” Kennedy Monahan, friend of the University
Lawrence New, friend of the University
Marie Nicolette, friend of the University
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Notes submitted after July 1, 2019, will be featured in our next issue.
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