The A publication of Mount St. Mary Academy

WINTER 2021

MERCY ENDURES

170 YEARS of MERCY at MOUNT ST. MARY ACADEMY

EVALYN OSWALD WREN - A LEGACY OF HER OWN PG. 8 I ANNUAL REPORT PG. 20



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MISSION

Mount St. Mary Academy, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, develops young women with a moral and intellectual foundation rooted in Catholic tradition. Mercy-minded and college-prepared, our students meet the future with wisdom, compassion and integrity.

VISION

Equipped with knowledge, our graduates leave with confidence, courage, motivation and drive. Like Catherine McAuley, they are fierce pioneers, passionate about making a difference in their communities and the world.

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Continued from front cover:

in downtown Little Rock.

The St. Mary Academy graduating class of 1904

at the school's former location on Louisiana Street

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It is with great excitemen

that we celebrate our 170th birthday this year! Not only is Mount St. Mary **Academy known for being Arkansas'** oldest school in continuous operation, but we are also proud to be the third oldest Mercy school of the 53 in service across six countries and one territory. However, for generations of girls who have walked its hallways, Mount St. Mary Academy is better known simply as "home." I am pleased and humbled to be a part of this wonderful Mercy family that is so deeply rooted within our community of central Arkansas. What a great legacy we share!

The word "Mercy" takes on a whole new meaning for those who have enjoyed any length of time as a student, parent or faculty member here. Words like service, compassion, wisdom and integrity quickly come to mind. But perhaps even more, we recall the many Sisters of Mercy who came before us and courageously established the long-standing traditions we have embraced over the last 170 years and continue to hold so close to heart.

Our ability to not only survive but to thrive over time can be attributed to our strength, character and steadfast resolute to remain true to our Catholic and Mercy values. At no other time in recent history has this been more evident than during the extraordinary time of COVID. We are so thankful for the support, encouragement and resilience our entire Mount community - faculty, staff, students, families, alumnae and friends – has shown over the past year. Because of your deep love and care for this iconic institution, we enter our 170th year stronger than ever. Mercy endures.

As you read about our students and alumnae in our new Messenger, I am hopeful you will be reminded in heart and mind of what a truly special home Mount St. Mary has been to so many and what an incredible impact Mercy has made on so many lives.

It is with deep gratitude that we applaud ALL within our Mount community past and present. As we reflect upon and celebrate our rich 170-year history, we know our future is especially bright because of you. God has immensely blessed us as we begin another year ever committed to developing disciples of Mercy.

Thank you for your continued trust and faith in Mount St. Mary. Here's to the next 170 years!

Pattie Davis

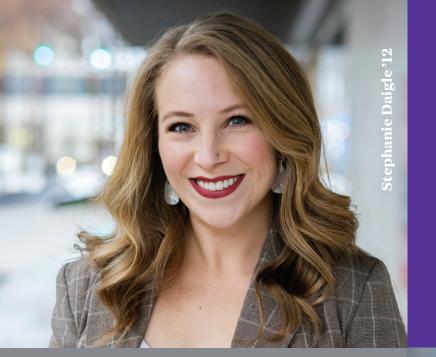
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A LEAGUE

OF THEIR

Mount St. Mary Academy is known for rigorous academic programs and a focus on community service. These principles formed the core of the following young alumnae, who have employed that formula to achieve and make a difference in the lives of others. They must, indeed, be Mount Girls.



Stephanie Daigle '12

Assistant Attorney General, Public Safety Division, Juvenile Section Office of Attorney General for the District of Columbia

In her role in D.C.'s Office of Attorney General, Stephanie Daigle works daily to reform the juvenile justice system to be fairer and more compassionate. It's the latest crusade for the MSM grad who said Mercy Values underpin everything she has done thus far in her

"From the 10,000-foot view, MSM taught me the importance of taking care of one another and fostered in me a sense of responsibility to my community — not just my local community, but the human family as a whole," she said. "As such, my legal career has largely focused on how to use the law to heal communities.

"Lawyers have the power to get close to the community's problems. They can push back against social conditions and institutions that put often insurmountable barriers in front of people. They can design systems that respect human dignity and protect the most vulnerable among us, and they can challenge existing structures that do not. They can even the odds for those with the odds stacked against them."

From a practical perspective, Daigle credits Mount with providing the kind of challenging academic environment that led her to graduate from the Honors College at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway and American University Washington College of Law, as well as earn a Master of International Affairs degree from American University School of International Service.

She said this combination of the academic and the philosophical has fueled her work, from serving foster youth in Faulkner County and helping refugees fleeing violence and persecution from 11 different countries to supporting survivors of college campus sexual assault, low-income tenants facing eviction and court-involved youth in Washington, D.C.

"I was challenged at MSM to give my best intellectually, to try on new ideas, to put myself in someone else's shoes, and to think creatively and outside the box," she said. "The learning environment at MSM fostered many opportunities to pair intellectual growth with empathy and compassion. I bring these skills to work with me every day."

Nancy Velazquez '16

Program Fellow for Community Development AR Kids Read

Since graduating from MSM, Velazquez's life has been a journey paved with accolades. She earned her undergraduate from Hendrix College in Conway where she also received the dual honors of the Betty F. Bumpers International Leadership and Fellowship Award and the Alice Hines Award for Excellence in Multicultural Leadership and Service.

Today, working toward her Master of Public Service degree at the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service, she gave credit to her Mount St. Mary sisters for pushing her to excel.

"Mount definitely helped me develop intellectually; the type of work we were doing in classes helped lay a strong foundation for me as I went into college," she said. "Academic work is cumulative, so that foundation put me in a good place to learn other skills in undergrad that are now helping me in my graduate program."

Velazquez said the lessons extended well beyond the classroom to address self-confidence and develop a strong understanding of who you are. She said these, too, have been invaluable in the time since.

"My biggest takeaway from Mount is that women are strong, capable and intelligent," she said. "Having an environment where we as girls were able to develop intellectually and personally really influenced me to be a stronger student and leader. It was not in direct competition, but I was definitely influenced to study a bit more and get better grades.

"When I started at Hendrix, I was taking physics and math courses where women were a minority — and a minority within the professional fields themselves, too. The other women and I discussed how we were viewed in these STEM fields, but we never doubted ourselves nor our capabilities because of our gender. And even now, with AR Kids Read, I am working with an amazing all-

"I am constantly inspired by these women as we collaborate to increase the reach and impact of our work. It is a real blessing, and I am grateful that I have had the chance to learn from them — a skill I first developed at Mount St. Mary."

McKenzie Moriconi '15

Intermediate II/Math Teacher **ACCESS Academy**

As a teacher for ACCESS Academy, McKenzie Moriconi works to assist children with a variety of developmental delays. As such, she said she's constantly finding ways to leverage her Mercy

"The Mercy Values continue to play a role in my life every day," she said. "I don't think you really notice how much of a role they play in your life until after you leave MSM. The Mercy Values are part of the foundation at Mount, so by the time you graduate they are a part of you.

"As a special education teacher, recognition of the intrinsic worth and dignity of each person and service to the poor, sick and uneducated are two that are the most present in my life today. As a teacher and a mentor to others, I always tell them that if you believe in yourself and you work hard, you can accomplish anything. And those are the exact things I learned at MSM."

Moriconi earned her bachelor's degree from Arkansas State University Online in 2019 and is currently working toward her Master of Special Education degree, a process fortified by her four years at MSM and the lessons of leadership and confidence her high school career gave her.

"Mount had a huge impact on my confidence, which has helped me succeed years after graduation," she said. "I used to be very nervous around others, especially those who are older than I am. I didn't want to voice an opinion that might offend someone, and I didn't want to ask questions that might make me seem uneducated or naive.

"At MSM, they encourage you to voice your opinions and ask questions. It didn't take long for me to come out of my shell and really embrace myself and my thoughts and opinions. I am the youngest teacher at my school, and when we have meetings or trainings, I have no problem speaking up and asking questions in front of my colleagues. The foundation of my confidence comes from MSM and has helped me believe in myself. It still pushes me today to work harder and become a better teacher."

Maria Neal '15

Doctor of Pharmacy Candidate Master of Public Health Candidate

UAMS Colleges of Pharmacy and Public Health

Neal's long transcript is laden with academic honors, extracurricular activities and community service. All of which, she said, was inspired and made possible by the challenging and compassionate environment of Mount St. Mary Academy.

"The most applicable thing that I learned at MSM is to serve. This is a value that MSM upheld in every aspect of the curriculum, from annual Mercy Day activities to junior theology service," she said. "As a MSM graduate, I have continued to learn and grow through my continuing education and through community involvement in my undergraduate and graduate studies."

Among these roles have been several leadership positions while studying for her undergraduate degree at the University of Central Arkansas and in her current graduate-level work. Through her job as a pharmacy technician at John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans' Hospital, she's reinforced her commitment to improving the lives of those who risked all to serve their country.

"Every day at work, I see the need for health care and community resources for patients and their families," she said. "The veteran population is so deserving yet so underserved, and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve these brave men and women while learning about pharmacy practice. I plan to continue working at the VA Hospital and possibly pursue a full-time career in the federal hospital system when I graduate."

Neal's life after Mount has been as full as during her high school years, including studying abroad in Costa Rica, working at a free clinic in Little Rock and standing up for her peers as a member of UCA's Housing Committee on Sexual Assault Awareness, to name a small sample. All of which, she said, is rooted in her passion for helping others.

"MSM helped nurture my love for serving the underserved," she said. "MSM taught me to serve everyone in need, wholeheartedly, no matter their race, religion or background. I plan to use my degrees to serve the poor and sick and respond to need, especially in trying times like what the current pandemic has illuminated. My MSM education helped me see that I can do anything, and so I put my heart into everything I do."

Laura Russell'13

Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Nurse

Children's Health, Dallas

Many Mount St. Mary graduates can tell you the role that the school played in preparing them for the job of their dreams. In Laura Russell's case, MSM inspired her very career in the first place.

"The most significant role that MSM played in my life was to introduce me to my life's work," she said. "I credit MSM and its emphasis on volunteerism and service with leading me to become a pediatric hematology/oncology nurse. In accumulating the volunteer hours needed for graduation, I volunteered at Camp Aldersgate in Little Rock during their hematology/oncology week.

"I began that week with the idea that I would be providing a positive influence and encouragement to the campers. I quickly learned an incredible life lesson from these children. Despite their diagnosis, they were more positive, uplifting and stronger than anyone I had ever met. That's when I knew my heart was drawn to caring for these children."

After the experience at Camp Aldersgate, Russell volunteered at Arkansas Children's Hospital, which reinforced her desire to work as a pediatric registered nurse. Following graduation, she enrolled at the University of Arkansas, where she earned her bachelor's degree in Nursing in 2018. She is now living the life she imagined as a pediatric hematology / oncology nurse at Children's Health in Dallas, a life she was inspired to achieve during that impactful community service assignment in high school.

"The love and the encouragement that was shown to me at MSM shaped who I am today. Throughout college and in my career, I have always tried to be a positive force and to provide encouragement and love to everyone I come in contact with," she said. "Although I strive to exhibit all of the Mercy Values emphasized at MSM, the most important in my life is service. I consider it an honor to serve the children and families that I care for at Children's Health in Dallas."

Jennifer Alicia Sustaita '19

Sports Management and Communications Major

Arkansas State University

A sophomore at ASU, Alicia Sustaita is Outreach Chairman for Student Diversity and Recruitment and an office holder in two student organizations, one of which she founded. While that sounds like a lot, achievement is customary for this young woman thanks, she says, to Mount St. Mary.

"Mount St. Mary played a role in my personal, spiritual and intellectual development," she said. "Mount taught me to be responsible, wise, determined, passionate, confident and most definitely opened my eyes within my faith.

"Once I began college at Arkansas State University, I became a part of the Latin Sorority Expansion Project, an organization that is bringing the first Latin sorority to ASU. Toward the end of my freshman year, I also began an organization called Hermana y Hermano, which is a mentorship program for incoming students to assist with academics and build leadership and social skills. I founded it because I had difficulty when starting college, and I wanted to do something for incoming ASU students who did not know how to adjust to college."

Hermano y Hermano struck a nerve with the student body, signing up 60 members in its inaugural year.

"The Mercy Values had a huge impact on the way Hermana y Hermano was incorporated. It is more than just another campus organization; H&H mentors incoming students not only in school, but also in life," Sustaita said. "A lot of mentees told their mentor that if it was not for H&H, they would not know what to do their freshman year."

Sustaita said the help she gives new students through Hermana y Hermano reflects the help she's received from her alma mater at various points in her life.

"My time at Mount was very different," she said. "My life outside of Mount St. Mary was very difficult, and I had to grow up very quickly compared to others. My senior year was most definitely the year that Mount had its biggest impact on me. I was going through a very rough time in my life, and my safe haven was, and still to this day is, Mount St. Mary.

"To me, Mount was never just a school. Mount has always been home." M



"Although I strive to exhibit all of the Mercy Values emphasized at MSM, the most important in my life is service. I consider it an honor to serve the children and families that I care for at Children's Health in Dallas."

- Laura Russell '13



"The veteran population is so deserving vet so underserved, and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve these brave men and women while learning about pharmacy practice. I plan to continue working at the VA Hospital and possibly pursue a full-time career in the federal hospital system when I graduate." - Maria Neal '15



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The heart of a leader, THE SOUL of a

OUNT ST. MARY ACADEMY PRINCIPAL SARA JONES DIDN'T GROW UP IN LITTLE **ROCK AND THEREFORE NEVER GOT** THE CHANCE TO OFFICIALLY "BE A MOUNT GIRL." But given the many challenges she's had to face leading MSM's administration, she's demonstrated a heart of houndstooth.

"I used to jokingly say, 'God, if you don't want me to do this job, that's all you have to say. You don't have to keep piling all this stuff on," she said with a laugh. "But then somebody told me, 'It needed to be you.' That really changed things for me. That was very humbling.

"It has been a challenging time, but it has also put a lot of things in perspective and made us take a hard look at why we do some of the things that we do and get down to the brass tacks of who we are."

grade at St. Theresa's. Working on her educational specialist degree, she sought an internship at Mount, not knowing another seed was being planted. "I was hanging around Mount every

Arkansas in Conway while teaching fifth

day after school for a couple of weeks and didn't know they needed an assistant principal," she said. "It just kind of fell into my lap."

Four years as assistant principal led to principal, where she's in her second year. And what a two years it has been. Jones called the pandemic the biggest challenge of her professional life, but she also noted the fundamentals of Mercy education provided staff and students alike a beacon in troubled times.

"The cornerstone of everything we do is continuing a strong foundation of our curriculum and teaching," she said. "The heart of who we are is still the same. We're still preparing these girls for college, we're still blowing national tests out of the water, we're way higher on our AP test scores than the national and state averages. We're still excelling in all of these areas, we're adding new programs and we're offering girls opportunities to explore avenues they didn't know were there.

"I also think you have to remember at the heart of everything we do are the Mercy Values, which we have been instilling in young women for 170 years. Those things can be adapted for any situation. It's all in the approach."

With this foundation intact, Jones believes all other obstacles can be met and overcome. Through pandemics and wartime to shifting economic and social climates, the more things change the more they stay the same for the oldest continually operating high school in the state.

"There is just such a vibe about this school," she said. "When people say, 'Must be a Mount Girl,' you really don't have an appreciation for it until you're in the building. I always tell people when we're recruiting girls to come to Mount, if we can get them in this building it will sell

"It's such a wonderful experience to see these girls support each other, uplift each other, watch them turn the corner from timid freshmen into young women who are confident, know what they want to do and are proud of their accomplishments. I'm blessed to witness it every day." M



Jones grew up in Texarkana, Texas, and after moving to Little Rock in 1998, earned her degree in business from John Brown University. She began substitute teaching at St. Theresa School in Little Rock and in so doing, stumbling onto her calling in life.

"The subbing meant I was up there all the time," she said. "The fifth-grade teacher's husband was relocated, so the principal approached me about going back to school to become a teacher."

Jones earned a Master of Arts in teaching from the University of Central







MERCY VALUES, **EDUCATION RUNS** IN THE FAMILY

From left: Evalyn Oswald Wren at St. Edward Catholic Church on her wedding day.

Evalyn enjoying a warm day, perhaps at Cove Lake during one of many family trips to Mount Magazine.

Impromptu photo after bath time of the Wren family circa 1960. With six-week-old twin boys in Evalyn's lap, her husband, and four daughters, ages six, four, two, and one.

ELEN WARD CHEEK '07 RE-MEMBERS CLEARLY MOUNT ST. MARY'S BACCALAUREATE MASS. WHERE SENIORS' NAMES ARE **READ AND LEGACIES ARE INVITED TO STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED.** One by one, she watched her classmates rise in tandem with their alumnae kinfolk, showing the ties that bind generations of Mount Girls in families.

At the sound of her name, Cheek stood tall in unison with her mother, two aunts and her grandmother, Evalyn Wren, beaming her trademark smile. But what happened next made Cheek prouder than even her own moment in the spotlight.

"Katie Rowen," intoned the lector.

Rowen, Cheek's best friend, stood up before the large congregation. With no legacy preceding her, Rowen stood alone, looking out over a sea of friendly but largely unfamiliar faces. Then, a rustling broke the silence as one small, stylishly attired woman with a shock of white hair rose, proudly, to her feet. Evalyn Wren.

"I'll always remember how much that meant to Katie," Cheek said. "That was something my grandmother wanted to give to my friend. She extended that, 'Hey, you're a part of our family, too. My legacy can be passed to you as well.' Mimi was just like that."

Evalyn Wren spent a lifetime producing and promoting Mount Girls. A poster child for Mercy Values if there ever was one, her MSM family tree is a mighty oak trimmed in houndstooth and purple.

"The value of a good education, and a good Catholic education in particular, was instilled in Mother at an early age, and she lived that," said daughter Amanda Wren Crosby '72. "It wasn't easy for Mother to send all of us to Catholic school, starting with grade school; there was a time when

8 | THE MESSENGER WINTER 2021 | 9





Above: Evalvn Oswald Wren (back right) served on the chairmen committee in charge of arrangements for the MSM Senior Ball.

she had four kids in college and four kids in Catholic high school. In any big family, you know there are sacrifices being made, but she never made us feel like she was making the sacrifice to send us there, both she and Daddy.

"That's something that becomes ingrained in you. Her mother made sacrifices for her and she made sacrifices for us, so we were willing to make sacrifices to send our children to St. Mary. I don't think there was ever any doubt in our minds where our daughters would

Were Evalyn to stand up today, her direct legacy would number a dozen MSM graduates, including two sisters, four daughters and six granddaughters. But that wouldn't be the end of it. Throw in a daughter-in-law, two granddaughters -in-law and the many friends of all of the above to whom she was the equivalent of a Mercian den mother, and the list of those standing with her is long.

She was always about making everyone feel included. She welcomed the one who was lost. She'd always talk about. 'We need to do something about this one; they're feeling lost, something is off here.' It could be a family member, a friend, neighbor, anybody."

"Our mother never met a stranger; she always welcomed the stranger," said daughter Leslie Wren Ward '76. "She was always about making everyone feel included. She welcomed the one who was lost. She'd always talk about, 'We need to do something about this one; they're feeling lost, something is off here.' It could be a family member, a friend, neighbor, anybody, whatever.

"It was all part of an attitude she had of, 'Hey you. You need some support? You need a family?' Then she would gather her troops — us — and say, 'We need to ...,' That always meant all of us were getting on board for someone who needed it."

Born Dec. 14, 1922, to first-generation German-American parents, Evalyn Louise Oswald Wren graduated from Mount St. Mary Academy in 1940. At an early age, she developed the core principles of hard work and faith that would anchor her until the end of her life. Coming up through St. Edward School in downtown Little Rock. by age 12 she'd taken over the household's kitchen, freeing her mother to work in the family grocery store.

After high school, she attended Little Rock Junior College (now UA Little Rock)

and worked for the USO. Catholic Social Services and Reynolds Metals Company prior to marrying David Wren in 1952. They worked side-by-side in various entrepreneurial efforts, including Pilou's Barbeque Restaurant, Wren's Grass Farm and American Medical Rentals, which thrives to this day.

Not coincidentally, work ethic and self-sufficiency were preached, modeled and expected of each of her children and grandchildren as the fundamental road to success.

"She was really, really intelligent; even if she hadn't married my grandfather, she would have been able to hold her own during a time when women didn't necessarily do that," Cheek said. "She taught us as women to respect ourselves and to work hard and not give up."

"Mother instilled in us we had to do something to be sure we got our own life," said Crosby. "We couldn't think, like many did back in the day, 'Well, we're just going to marry somebody who's going to take care of us.'

"In high school, I remember she and Daddy encouraged us to study math and accounting because, she used to tell us, no matter what you do in your life, you're going to use the math. It will help organize your brain. I can hear her on washing dishes, 'You'll wash those dishes better because you studied math.""

Evalyn's magic touch extended to her grandchildren. Cheek lived just around the corner and remembers the times spent with her Mimi as important building blocks for understanding who she was and what she wanted to become in life.

"What's pretty incredible about her, and I think my cousins and sisters would say the same, we all had a closeness to her," she said. "When I was a young child, she was almost like another parent to me. When I got older, she became more like a best friend. She taught me a lot of the values that I still have today, about getting up and being a functioning, contributing member of society.

"She was nice and compassionate and she was always interested in her grandkids. She wanted to know how you're doing, how you're feeling, how your life is going, how are your relationships. Tell me some stories from work, you know. She was always very invested."

Mount St. Mary Academy was often at the heart of these conversations. As

*Really, she taught

us that Mercy Value

to respect the basic

intrinsic value of

every person."

Clockwise from top right: MSM Girls Just Want to Have Fun event. Evalyn Oswald Wren is seated with all her daughters, a daughterin-law and granddaughter behind.

A trip to Eureka Springs. Six of the eight pictured are MSM grads: Jane Allison Wren Shimizu '74, Amanda Wren Crosby '72, Evalyn Oswald Wren '40, Anne Leslie Wren Ward '76, Anne Ward Tubbs '10, and Helen Ward Cheek '07. Not shown is another MSM alumnae who took the picture — Sydney Crosby '09.

Evalyn (front and center) with all of her children gathered around her, celebrating her twin sons' 50th birthdays in 2010.

Cheek and her cousins moved into high school, Evalyn played an integral role modeling and reinforcing how to live the Mercy Values, just as she had done for her daughters.

"My friends loved coming over to her house with me. Then, it got to the point that my high school friends were inviting Mimi over to come have dinner with their families," Cheek said. "That happened all the time."

The life of every family is a series of beginnings and endings; when a chapter ends, the hope is that there's been enough. A child leaves home, parents hope they gave them enough to succeed; someone dies, survivors hope they took enough example to carry on. Asked what Evalyn left them enough of upon her passing in March 2019 at age 96, the Mount Girls paused to find the words.



"Really, she taught us that Mercy Value to respect the basic intrinsic value of every person," Ward said. "I learned that from her, from both of our parents, really. And, she was a very strong person; she gave us that as well."

"She gave us enough love that we could do the same thing for our own children and for each other," said Crosby. "She had a very strong Catholic faith, and she passed that on to us. That was a priority for her, and I think that was another reason why she wanted us to go to St. Mary in that it continued not only our education but our Catholic formation. I think we really would have been different people if we hadn't gone there." M



IKE ALL MEMBERS OF THE CLASS OF 2021, SARAH CATE LAY IS EXPERIENCING THE MANY **MILESTONES THAT MARK A FINAL YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL.** As she does so, she's intensely aware of the role her MSM sisters have played in her time as a Mount Girl, the formative period of her life.

"When I got here, I knew my older sister and one other girl that I had gone to school with in North Little Rock, and that was it," she said. "I'm not going to lie; those first two weeks were hard because you're leaving middle school, and you're in a very awkward stage of your life.

"But very soon, I was able to find my place and get involved, and now I have a friend group that I absolutely adore. I love those girls, and I can't imagine finishing high school with anyone else."

Finding a new friend group was just one of the happy discoveries Lay made in high school. In fact, her Mount experience was a revelation from the very start.

"It really was never my plan to go to Mount St. Mary Academy," she said. "I remember going into it, I was so set in my mind that I would not be a Belle."

Lay knew her parents were sold on the school after the supportive environment it provided her older sister Chloe '19. Still, the North Little Rock native eyed the newly renovated public high school and set her mind to attend there.

"My mom was like, 'We're not going to make the decision for you, but you do have to go shadow at Mount.' Well, I shadowed and ended up loving it," she said. "I think a lot of it had to do with being an all-girl environment. I also loved the fact it was all-female leadership; I thought that was really cool.

"I remember shadowing that day, and I really just felt it in my heart that this is where I need to spend the next four years of my life. I remember I had gone with a friend, and on the car ride home I called my mom and was like, 'Hey, how soon can we get enrolled?""

Lay's love for the school only deepened over the next four years as is evident by her many accomplishments in and outside of the classroom. So many, in fact, that it's hard to imagine her ever considering any other high school. Student body president, four years and captain of the Rockettes dance team, Beta Club, National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Green Club and Diversity Club all crowd for space on her resume.

She's particularly enjoyed being a Mountie Messenger Ambassador, where she's had the chance to give prospective

students the same revelatory introduction to the school that she had.

"Mountie Messenger Ambassadors are the girls you shadow who are already going to Mount," she said. "When I shadowed in the eighth grade, I shadowed a Mountie Messenger named Anna Brady who was a junior. At the time I was like, 'I want to do Ambassadors, too!' It's a major part of helping girls see Mount St. Mary Academy as the place they should go to high school."

As she ponders the next chapter of her life, Lay keeps coming back to the lessons she has learned over four years that will serve her well in the future.

"My teachers, without a doubt, have very, very high expectations of us, but they're also there for their students because they want us to succeed," she said. "They expect us to be leaders in the community, in the classroom, and they expect us as juniors and seniors to be leaders for the underclassmen. This expectation, the skills we learn in the classroom and the high standards that they have, helped me grow into the person that I am today." M

I remember shadowing that day, and I really just felt it in my heart that this is where I need to spend the next four years of my life."

FOR I WAS HUNGRY...

LONGTIME TEACHER MOVES NONPROFIT TO HEAD OF THE CLASS



The 1974 MSM graduate had just taken over as executive director for Neighbor to Neighbor of Jefferson County, a Pine Bluff-based nonprofit dedicated to feeding the hungry. On her first in-depth tour of the premises, she opened the bathroom door to see it was essentially empty.

"I was like, 'Why is there no soap in the bathroom? Where are the paper towels and the toilet paper?'" she remembered. "'Well, they just steal them, so we don't put them in there,' my staff told me. hundreds of people who look to Neighbor to Neighbor for help.

"One of the things people tend to do is keep an arm's distance away from somebody who is homeless or looks a little worn or whatever," she said. "My goal is to make everybody feel like they're coming to my house for dinner."

Tate was raised by a widowed single mother and grew up the third of four children, for whom there was no doubt they would receive a Catholic education. The middle of three girls, Mary Pat (so named by one of the nuns to tell her apart from a Pat

At St. Mary, we were always taught about the community and giving and helping and serving the poor. That was instilled in me early."

That's nonsense, I thought. That is really not the solution.

"I believe in treating the whole person. Just because you're poor doesn't mean that you have to come into a place that looks like, well, you know. I thought, if I treat people with dignity, they'll treat me with dignity."

Tate turned that simple philosophy into marching orders for the nonprofit, its eight employees and the mission of serving the

Smith classmate) had no choice but to wear the houndstooth, but it didn't take long to also realize how special the place was.

"I'm a third-generation Mount Girl," she said. "At St. Mary, we were always taught about the community and giving and helping and serving the poor. That was instilled in me early."

Tate not only learned her Mercy Values, she put them to work daily over a 37-year teaching career.

"I tried to be an empathetic teacher. I always tried to go over and above what other teachers did," she said. "I don't want to brag, but they'd often say, 'I can't believe you sat in there and helped that student with that paper for two hours.' It's like, well, you know, she needed help."

By the time she took over Neighbor to Neighbor in July 2019, she was looking for a change from the classroom. She knew nothing about running a nonprofit, so she employed what she did know.

"The patience and empathy I've had as a teacher certainly opened my eyes to the difficulties of the people I'm serving at Neighbor to Neighbor," she said. "They've been through hard times, and it's just really easy to see them as people. I trace that back to my St. Mary's upbringing."

One of the area's oldest food pantry/soup kitchens in Jefferson County, Neighbor to Neighbor serves 100 hot lunches a day, plus provides groceries, help with utilities and prescription drugs and distributes clothing to those who need it.

Given her lack of experience, every day has been an education — and with the onset of COVID-19, a doctorate-level course at that. Ironically, she credits the pandemic for making her better and more informed about her job.

"The pandemic made me really think about food insecurity and how it is one of the primary threats to global security," she said. "It is certainly a threat in Jefferson County. Everybody thinks of Pine Bluff



Above: Pat Smith Tate, executive director for Neighbor to Neighbor of Jefferson County, located in Pine Bluff.

as being a place of crime and all of these things. I tie food insecurity into what goes on in the environment around us."

To that end, Tate works to make the environment as inviting and supportive as possible. And while the daily lines of the hungry are still long, there are plenty of little victories to back up her

philosophy, starting with the now fully stocked washroom.

"I just said, 'Hey! Don't steal our toilet paper. That's here for everybody. I mean, come on,'" she said. "And I never had one thing stolen since. Really, nothing. It's like I said, if you treat them like people, they respect you back." M

made me really think about food insecurity and how it is one of the primary threats to global security."

14 | THE MESSENGER WINTER 2021 | 15



1999 **BELLE MOVES** TO HER **OWN BEAT**

OUISIANA-BORN CATHERINE COVINGTON THORPE '99 HAS ALWAYS HAD THE MUSIC IN HER.

Her passion for movement and health inspired her to create an entirely new fitness segment, something she balances with her roles in family and faith. And it all started, she says, with discovering herself during four years at the Mount.

MSM: When did you first get interested in dance?

CCT: I've taught dance my whole life, and it's always been something I love. I would have been a dance major in college, but my dad was like, "I'm not going to pay for a dance degree." I totally understood.

I danced in college at Ole Miss, and I was a cheerleader for the Kansas City Chiefs in Kansas City. I started teaching dance and selling dance and cheerleader apparel pretty soon after college. I taught dance until I was pregnant with my third baby, Oliver, and the schedule just got to be too much.

When did vou discover barre. and how did Full Out Barre come about?

I tried my first barre class after I had Oliver, and I immediately fell in love with it. I weaseled my way into a job at the Little Rock Racquet Club because I just kept saying, "Oh, I'd love to teach here! Here's my resume." One day, everybody was injured or sick — all of the instructors — so they begrudgingly gave me shot, and I did a good job.

Full Out Barre is actually a fitness program I created. I did something really different; I added high-intensity, interval



Above: Catherine Covington Thorpe with several of her instructors at the Full Out Barre in Little Rock. Thorpe opened their first studio in Little Rock and is selling franchises in other parts of the country.

training with more traditional barre work. Everywhere I went, the classes got really packed, to the point people would throw elbows to get in the class or do it outside in the lobby. It was really fun.

I had several people approach me and say, "You should really do something with this." So, I spent about a year of late nights and early mornings developing what Full Out Barre was going to be. I pursued accreditation, and I decided to go with the most challenging accreditation body, which is the National Academy of Sports Medicine. Suddenly, I had a business on my hands; we opened our first studio and set up to sell franchises, and here I am.

How did your time at the Mount prepare you for life in college or the business world?

Mount St. Mary Academy gave me self-confidence. I am somebody who was kind of set up for failure in that area. I had some family issues, and I had some health issues. I wasn't the smartest person at Mount where it's very, very favorable to be highly academic. I could have come away feeling less confident, but I didn't. I came away with a lot of self-confidence and felt affirmed in who I was and not trying to be somebody I wasn't.

I'd never guess you as anything but a great student.

I'm a solid B average gal. I've never been a star student. I only got as good

of grades as my parents said I had to so that I could do social activities. This is just totally honest. But I love people, and I love learning about people and being with people. And when I look back at my time at Mount St. Mary Academy, my takeaway is probably the people skills.

How have you been able to incorporate spiritual values and Mercy Values into your life and your business now?

That is the most beautiful piece of my life. I raise my precious kiddos to be aware of the world around them. With my business, I want our studio to be a place of refuge where every shape, color, size and background is welcomed, feels loved, feels accepted and feels encouraged. I tell my staff, "I don't care if the woman walking in drove a beat-up van and is wearing a baggy T-shirt. You treat her like she is the most important woman in the room."

I also spend a lot of time thinking about how to really use my talents wisely. I think, "God, what talents did you give me? How can I use them to love our community and love the people around us?" That can be anything, even how to handle things financially well. From day one, I didn't want to be in debt. I got out of debt super quickly. I worked really hard to be debtfree so that I could always operate from a place of generosity. M

American ******GIRL

SENIOR TAKES ACTIVE ROLE IN ELECTION PROCESS



RAN EDWARDS '21 MISSED THE CHANCE TO VOTE IN 2020 BY MERE MONTHS, BUT THE 17-YEAR-OLD IS SO ENAMORED WITH THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, SHE DID THE NEXT BEST THING.

"I was pretty disappointed because I couldn't vote in November, but I still wanted to be involved in the election," she said. "I was scrolling through Tik Tok, and I saw an advertisement for this organization, PollHero.org, that gets teens signed up to work at polling places. I was like, this sounds right up my alley."

Edwards was selected to serve as an election clerk, checking in voters as they report to the polling place, verifying their identity and that they are registered.

"It was fascinating to see the different types of people who came in to vote. It reminded me that anyone [of age] can

vote, and that everyone should vote. It was also very interesting to be on the inside of the process. Most notably, it made me realize this: for some, it is quite difficult to vote. So many people who came in were accidentally at the wrong precinct, or they had recently moved so they had to change their registration."

The senior first developed an interest in politics during middle school at North Little Rock Catholic Academy. Spurred by her parents' roster of podcasts and plenty of selfreflection, her political thought continued to develop right up to the present day.

"During the pandemic, I had a lot more time to myself, and I learned a lot more about politics and formed more of my political opinions during that time," she said. "At this point in my life, I care more about politics than I ever have. I talk about politics with my peers pretty much daily, whether they want to or not."

She has also gained confidence in her views and expressing them thanks to her classes at Mount.

"In one of my classes last year, AP European History, we did this Socratic seminar about Marxism," she said. "I like Marxist teachings a lot. I'm into it; I read his books and things like that. I was debating with my classmates about his theories, and I was educating them on what they're saying."

Edwards' desire to volunteer to serve at a polling place in November came with a price — an in-person training session and a long Election Day, from open to close. She also took a voluntary absence in order to do it but said the prevailing themes of the recent presidential election made her more than willing to put principles into action.

Rachel McLemore, MSM social studies teacher who taught Edwards in her AP U.S. History class, said she hoped the day provided her student an illuminating look at democracy in action.

"I think the biggest lesson that's most unique to this experience is the mechanics at the local level," she said. "All of the different parts, the people that are involved, the sheer number of people that are required in order to pull this off and the value of that kind of civic participation."

"During the pandemic, I had a lot more time to myself, and I learned a lot more about politics and formed more of my political opinions during that time."

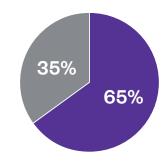
Edwards hopes to attend Hendrix College next year where she'll study international relations. She's also got a couple of elections under her belt, serving as a senior class officer and vice president of the MSM Thespian Troupe. She said she doesn't see herself running for office in the future, but she wouldn't rule it out either.

"Sometimes I think about (running for office). It's not necessarily one of my No. 1 goals for things I see in my future," she said. "But I do want to be a public servant, and I would like to work in Washington, D.C." M

Mount St. Mary Academy BY THE NUMBERS



AVERAGE CLASS SIZE:



65% CATHOLIC **35%** OTHER FAITHS

\$464,000 **ASSISTANCE AWARDED** 25% of students RECEIVE FINANCIAL **ASSISTANCE**

25+ local organizations served through Junior Service Learning Program



STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO:

AND SPORTS TEAMS

AP courses plus an AP Capstone Diploma Program

OF COLLEGE CREDIT
AVAILABLE THROUGH **HOURS CONCURRENT CREDIT PROGRAM** 25.5 average ACT COMPOSITE SCORE (compared to 19 state and 20.6 national averages)

↓ OUR 2020 GRADUATES ↓

EARNED \$19.7 million

IN COLLEGE **SCHOLARSHIPS** ATTENDING **31 DIFFERENT** COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN 17 STATES

TWO NATIONAL MERIT FINALISTS

63% graduated WITH HONORS

NEARLY 1/4 SCORED A 30 OR HIGHER **■** on the ACT

10,000+ hours SERVICE

ACCEPTED AT 113 HIGHER **EDUCATION** INSTITUTIONS

18 | THE MESSENGER

ANNUAL REPORT OF GIFTS

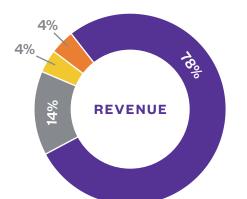


MSM

This report gratefully recognizes the generous support from our alumnae, parents, parents of alumnae, grandparents, faculty, staff and friends. Everyone at Mount St. Mary appreciates the unwavering commitment to our school as demonstrated by all those who made contributions in various capacities during the 2019-2020 year. Their dedication to our mission, and to helping ensure a strong future for Mount St. Mary, is truly an inspiration.

To err is human; to forgive, divine.

The MSM Foundation Office has worked diligently to ensure the accuracy of this report of gifts. If your name was omitted or improperly noted, please accept our apologies. If you notice such an error, we ask that you notify Database Coordinator Elaine Miller at 501-476-3375 or emiller@mtstmary.edu so our records can be corrected. Thank you.



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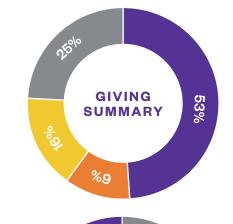
MOUNT ST. MARY OPERATING ACTIVITY

2019-2020 REVENUE

■ Tuition & Fees	78%
■ Contributions	14%
Income from Investments	4%
■ Other Income	4%

2019-2020 EXPENSES

	■ Instructional & Student Programs	58%
	■ Management & General	26%
	■ Tuition Assistance	9%
	Advancement & Recruitment	7%



ENDOWED

FUNDS

MOUNT ST. MARY FUNDRAISING

2019-2020 GIVING SUMMARY

■ The Fund for Mount St. Mary	\$465,104	53%
■ Endowment Gifts	\$222,776	25%
■ Tuition Assistance	\$143,015	16%
■ Designated Gifts	\$48,459	6%

Total Contributions

\$879,354



■ Endowments for Tuition Assistance	\$6,470,697	53%
■ Endowments for School Operations	\$5,834,240	47%

Total Endowed Funds

\$12,304,937





THE FUND FOR MOUNT ST. MARY HONOR ROLL

JULY 1. 2019 - JUNE 30. 2020

The names listed on the following pages recognize those who, throughout their generous and thoughtful gifts, have partnered with us to strengthen Mount St. Mary Academy. The Fund for Mount St. Mary donors for our fiscal year from July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2020, are included in this honor roll. We extend a spirit of gratefulness to all of those who made a gift to The Fund for Mount St. Mary and to our leadership team who devoted their time and energy to this successful campaign.

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The Fund for Mount St. Mary is our annual giving campaign. It adds to the general fund of the school's budget to help increase tuition assistance opportunities, improve facilities, purchase state-of-the-art equipment, upgrade technology, and recruit and retain outstanding faculty and staff in short, ensuring the continuation of quality education.

Patricia Callahan '65 & Davis Rernstein

22 | THE MESSENGER WINTER 2021 | 23





continued...

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26 | THE MESSENGER



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Patti Johnston Burton

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32 | THE MESSENGER WINTER 2021 | 33

ANNUAL REPORT

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CELEBRATING DINNER BELLES' SUCCESS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dinner Belles had to be postponed and was hosted virtually for the first time in its 35-year history on August 29, 2020. The event's participants enjoyed several special treats in addition to the opportunity to bid on more than 100 fabulous auction items ranging from art, jewelry, wine and dining to unique gift packages and excursions. Sponsors were provided a delicious meal from Cheers in the

Heights for up to 10 people, a bottle of wine and special dessert to enjoy while bidding with small groups of friends from the comfort of their homes. Regular ticket holders received a bottle of wine and dessert, as well. At the end of the night, more than \$35,000 had been raised between the online auction and appeal for tuition assistance.

We are so grateful for the parents, alumnae, sponsors and friends of Mount St. Mary

who participated in this important event, or made a gift to the school in its honor. We are especially thankful for our incredible 2020 Dinner Belles Committee, chaired by MSM alumna Tonya Stringer Franzetti '92 and MSM parent Kim Markland, for their tireless work organizing a fun and memorable event amid such unique circumstances. We are already looking forward to our next Dinner Belles in 2022!

MOUNT ST. MARY # ENDOWMENTS

The endowments at Mount St. Mary address key areas of need for the school and occupy an important place in its future financial security. If you would like to contribute to any of the existing endowments or scholarship funds, please contact the Foundation Office at 501-664-8006. New endowments for scholarships and tuition assistance can be established as a living tribute or in memory of a loved one with a minimum gift of \$25,000. This may be paid at the time the fund is established or over a multi-year period of up to five years.

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WINTER 2021 | 35

Friend FOR LEGE DONOR REMEMBERED AS FRIEND, ACHIEVER AND THE EPITOME OF A MOUNT GIRL

HEN MARY ANNE WOODS '62 PASSED AWAY IN 2019, HER OBITUARY SPANNED FOUR SHORT PARAGRAPHS, BUT WHAT SHE ACCOMPLISHED IN HER LIFE AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS COULD FILL VOLUMES.

As an executive, she achieved success that she would share with the people and institutions that mattered most to her, including Mount St. Mary Academy. But it was the people she touched who were the true measure of her life well lived. To some she was a mentor, to others a confidante and to others, simply a ray of light shining into every situation.

Perhaps no one knew this better than one of her oldest friends, Donna Higgins Rainey '62, now of Denton, Texas.

"We met at St. Patrick School in North Little Rock in the second grade," Rainey



said. "She was an only child, and her parents practically raised me. I did not have a very good family life, so I spent an awful lot of time at her house."

From an early age, Woods seemed to have the golden touch with everything she tried. Smart, athletic and devout, she was a role model for the people around her, Rainey especially.

"She was her father's child. She loved to hunt with her dad, and she loved her dogs. She even had a horse, right up there on Park Hill in her backvard," Rainey remembers. "She was very brainy and very athletic. Jerry Jones, who's the owner of the Dallas Cowboys now, used to come up and play basketball with us.

"A female back then, you just sort of let boys always win. Not Mary Anne. She was very competitive, but she was generous always. For an only child, she was not selfish."

The duo entered Mount St. Mary Academy in 1958 and would distinguish themselves through various clubs and activities. Woods' participation reflected her wide range of talents and interests, including Glee Club, Sodality, Mercian staff and various academic clubs.

She and Rainey were both cheerleaders and in National Honor Society, among other shared extracurriculars, but Rainey said it was hard to keep up with her friend.

"I'd come a lot closer to doing things that were wrong than she would. She would never do anything wrong," Rainey said. "She was very straight, right by the book, always, throughout her entire life.

"I spent many a night at her house. I often wished that my parents could have been like her or that my mother could have been like her mother. She taught us right from wrong and manners. I

always attribute the success that I've had in life to being friends with Mary Anne and her parents taking care of me."

Following graduation, Woods attended Little Rock University (now UA Little Rock), after which she moved to New Orleans and settled into what would be a lifelong career with Mobil Oil.

Woods never married, and moving up the corporate ladder relocated her various places through the years, but she had a knack for creating lasting relationships at each stop. When she eventually landed in Houston, she and Rainey reconnected a bond that would remain right up to the end.

"She was diagnosed with cancer two years ago, maybe it was three years ago," Rainey said. "She was doing very well. Then last year, I had not seen her for about six months, nor talked to her. I get in the mail a bracelet that I had always admired that she wore all the time with a note from another friend of hers that said she was in the hospital and she is not coming back home. She's going downhill rather quickly.

"So, this girl, whom Mary Anne played golf with, a woman she worked with at the church, another lady she'd worked with at Mobil Oil and me, her childhood friend, we were all with her the day she passed away. I realized we represented all four facets of her life."

True to her nature, Mary Anne Woods divided her substantial estate among beloved relatives, her church and, notably, the Mount. To her cherished friends, she left sentimental trinkets that are a lasting tribute to friendship and laughter, memories Rainey holds dear.

"I consider it an honor to have been her friend," Rainey said. "She was one of the most special people I know." M

MSM'S 1851 SOCIETY **MEMORIALIZES ESTATE GIFTS**

When Cathey Henry, director of donor giving, was informed of Mary Anne Woods' generous gift to the school, it was the first time she'd heard the 1962 graduate had intended to make such a gift. However, she said, that's not unusual among many people who build planned giving strategies into their estate planning.

"Mary Ann had not notified us, so we did not know that she had us in her will," Henry said. "That often happens with people who plan to leave a bequest. Some people are moved to send in a check because they get a mailing, and then there are those who know that they want to make a more substantial donation after they pass. These people are no less philanthropicminded, even though they might not make smaller donations while they are alive."

Planned giving is a way for people to make a charitable gift at the time their estate is settled. While it's most often in cash, it can take almost any form - real estate or property, stocks, life insurance payouts. Such gifts can also be customized according to the donor's wishes.

"Most people do it because they believe in Catholic education, and in some way, shape or form, they want to leave a legacy," Henry said. "Or, it can be more specific. They might say, 'I want this to go to tuition assistance because when I was at Mount St. Marv. I received tuition assistance.' Or, 'Hey, I played basketball. I want all of my money to go toward athletics facilities,' or something like that."

Henry said the most important aspect about planned giving is it isn't reserved for large estates. Planned giving can be executed in any amount, and all who do so are memorialized in the school's 1851 Society as a lasting tribute.

"We do have a perpetual plaque, and we list their names here, in the office, if they allow us to." she said. "Whether you're a billionaire or you're of more modest means, every gift counts and it is all appreciated."

Mount St. Mary Academy does not provide tax advice or estate planning services. Always consult a qualified attorney or tax preparer. To learn more, contact Cathey Henry at cahenry@mtstmary.edu.



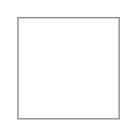
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Parents of MSM alumnae, if your daughter has finished college and you are receiving her *Messenger* at your home, please notify the Foundation Office of her change of address so the magazine can be sent directly to her in the future. Call 501-476-3375 or email emiller@mtstmary.edu.





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