



St. Benedict Academy
Alumnae Association
Newsletter
Winter 2024

St. Benedict Academy:

Have an address change?
Story to share?
Idea to highlight your class in the newsletter?
Email Linda Romey, OSB, Communications Office

lromey@eriebenedictines.org

"We'll always come to thee again, when alma mater calls."

Class of '67 Reunion

Once again the Class of '67 met for their annual picnic at Erie County Veterans Memorial Park in Millcreek. It's especially nice to have the out-of-towners there, and those who came for the first time. There is never a lack of conversation, and the day ends much too soon. The group also stays in touch through a class email, sharing news, requesting prayers, and keeping informed about their SBA sisters. Fortunately, they plan to continue the fun at the Christmas Party. If you are not receiving class e-mails, and wish to be on the list, please e-mail hammondjanet@hotmail.com.



Class of '74 Reunion

The Class of '74 held their 50th reunion on Saturday, June 29, at the Lawrence Park Country Club. Forty alumnae reminisced, rekindled friendships, and enjoyed the event. They traveled from Florida, Illinois, New York, and Ohio. There was a memory table with yearbooks, photos, and programs of events held during our years at SBA. A memorial wall of our deceased classmates was on display and we donated towards a basket for the Christmas luncheon in their memory. Some alumnae attended *Where Hope is: Stories of Benedictine Influence* the next day. The alumnae committee sends emails inviting classmates to our monthly dinner. If you are not receiving them and wish to be included, please email lisaminerie@gmail.com.

Class of '79 Reunion

The Class of '79 celebrated their 45th reunion on June 30 at Calamari's. Twenty-one classmates celebrated, reminisce, and caught up on each other's lives. They came from Tennessee, Virginia, Florida, and Cleveland to join local classmates. Everyone enjoyed looking through a time capsule from their 9th grade Social Studies class. One classmate won a basket of Erie-made goodies. After the reunion, some attended the production of *Where Hope Is: Stories of Benedictine Influence* at the Blasco Library. Classmate Jane Wagner, director of Emmaus Ministries' Kids Cafe, offered tours of the ministry.



a legacy of women's empowerment

—*Where Hope Is* continued from back cover

Now a documentary theater-maker residing in New York, Jenn's Erie connection was her mother and her aunt who were both SBA graduates. She grew up hearing intriguing stories about their high school years. Then on March 21, 2022—the feast of St. Benedict—Jenn reached out to the Erie Benedictines and proposed an oral stories project. Jenn wrote, "I have heard my mom speak very fondly about her time at St. Ben's and the Benedictines over the years. I wonder if the Benedictines might be interested in being the focus of an oral story interview project. The Benedictines seem to be such a unique facet of the Erie community..." The presentation of *Where Hope Is* was, then, the culmination of a nearly two and a half year journey. Once Jenn had her interviews complete and began working on the script, she invited five actors to work with her on script development. Qianna Brooks, Katy Shafer, Amanda Vincenti, Lucy Medeiros, and Taylor Beckman, along with director Ashley Thaxton-Stevenson were drawn into the project—to the extent that they all

travelled to Erie not only to present the play but also to experience firsthand what they had been experiencing vicariously through the script.

The more than 60 recorded interviews that Jenn conducted for this project will contribute to a communal memoir of women's self-discovery and empowerment in the form of an online archive that is in production. See pages 4-5 for a sample of the wisdom gathered in the interviews. Scan the QR code to view the play.



Actor Amanda Vincenti, left, read the words of Donna Heaps, '73.



Class of '75 Planning Reunion

The Class of '75 is planning a 50th reunion next year, 2025. We are hoping to gather as many of our classmates as possible. Please contact **Gail Lorei Robinson** at garobinson@roadrunner.com if you are interested in helping, have any ideas, or just want to make sure we have updated information. We would love to hear from you!



2024 Scholarship Winners

The SBA Alumnae Association is pleased to announce that 25 scholarships of \$250 each were awarded to relatives of alumnae who will be attending Catholic grade or high schools for the 2024-25 school year. Funding comes from monies raised at the annual Christmas Party and the Cash Bingos.

Addison & Karson Biel, Cathedral Prep, by **Mary Kay Samluk '64**; Olivia White, Cathedral Prep, by **Paulanne Reske '66**; Davion Edmond, Cathedral Prep, by **Angela Vincent '83**; Mason Marc Kaliszewski, St George, by **Mary Alice Kaliszewski '74**; Madison & Noah Criscione, St Luke, by **J Christine Craig '68**; Addison Johnson, St Luke, by **Donna Heaps '73**; Mila Bender, St Jude, by **Ann Kelleher '81**; Bentley Vereb, St Jude, by **Virginia Vereb '71**; Camden Meacham, Our Lady of Peace, by **Gail Blaszczyk '71**; Madison Brooke Bisbee, Our Lady of Peace, by **Bridget Wickles '85**; Emily Marz, Our Lady of Peace, by **Rosemary Niebauer '72**; Gabby Gallenstein, Our Lady of Peace, by **Erin Gallenstein '91**; Graham & Quinn Hewitt, Our Lady of Peace, by **Catherine Rieger '79**; Delaney Anderson, Mercyhurst Prep, by **Christine Anderson '70**; David Rose, St George, by **Rose Marie Rose '90**; Josephine Kuzma, Mercyhurst Prep, by **Nancy Washke '71**; Abigail Koca, Mercyhurst Prep, by **Bonnie Prokocki '67**; Addison Johnson, St Luke, by **Donna Heaps '73**; Cassidy Netkowicz, Mercyhurst Prep, by **Donna Netkowicz '65**; Lily Sebald, Mercyhurst Prep, by **Mary Jean Hitz '64**; Jacob Loneck Perez, St Mary's - St Alphonsus Regional, by **Sister Rosanne Loneck '61**; Luna Leise, Mother Teresa Academy, by **Linda Falconer '64**; Ethan & Amelia Evans, Bishop Moore Catholic High School, by **Kathleen Schaaf '79**; Audrey Vamos, Lake Catholic, by **Kathleen Lane '67**; Noah Mazanowski, St James, by **Amelia Ranowiecki '84**; Carter John Kaliszewski, St George, by **Marie Turner '80**

Let us pray for SBA alumnae who have passed into eternity.

Madeline Rastatter Pesta '54
Patricia Ropelewski Mattis '64
Charlene Anderson Morvay '63
Eileen Betza Romeo '68
Marijean Scypinski Rousset-Dupre '69
Nancy Welz Alstadt '69
Dolores Jablonowski Donor '67
Lori Hicks '88
Dorothy Anderson Kraus '45
Mary Eileen Malinoski Bukowski '65
Karen Martyna Miehl '70
Joan Paszko Dirienzo '54
Kathy McCafferty Pianta '66
Marilyn Dahlkemper Niebauer '73
Heddy Giewont Hellmann '61
Connie Stephany La John '51
Patricia Maloney Fiorelli '61

Benedictine Sisters of Erie

Mount Saint Benedict Monastery
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Erie, PA 16511

Please alert Heather Cloutier, Benedictine Sisters Development Office, of any address changes. Call 814-899-0614, ext. 2573, or email hcloutier@eriebenedictines.org. If you prefer not to receive a print copy of *The Mount*, please let Heather know. Current and past issues of *The Mount* are available on our website at eriebenedictines.org/good-work/mount-magazine.html.

St. Benedict Academy: a legacy of women's empowerment as told in Where Hope Is: Stories of Benedictine Influence

Where Hope Is: Stories of Benedictine Influence, an interview-based theater production by playwright Jenn Bokoch Gillett, premiered in Erie on June 30 to a full house at the Hirt Auditorium, Blasco Memorial Library. The play reflects a snapshot-in-time—1960s to the 1980s—of the influence of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie as seen through the lives of the young women who attended St. Benedict Academy (SBA)—a school that closed in 1988 but whose alumnae association remains vibrant and strong.

The sheer volume of 120 years of well-educated, conscientious, and self-confident SBA graduates makes this women's story integral to Erie's history. Character-building was an inherent part of the SBA



Cast and crew: back row Michelle Basista, CFRE, fundraising, Sister Linda Romey, project coordinator, actors Taylor Beckman, Lucy Medeiros, Qianna Brooks, and Katy Shafer, stage manager Rachel Ahrens. Front row Michelle Scully, line producer, actor Amanda Vincenti, playwright/actor Jenn Bokoch Gillett, and director Ashley Thaxton-Stevenson.

Actor Katy Shafer, seated, reads the words of Ann Michalski, '81. Sadly, Ann lost her battle with cancer between the time of her interview and the performance.

experience. So was the unqualified value of women, the importance of creating a strong community, and a commitment to the greater good. SBA graduates, formed in these values, impacted the city's work force, classrooms and PTAs, parishes, organizations, and generations of families. Decades later, they continue to spread their influence.

Jenn created the script from a dozen conversations selected from more than 60 interviews she conducted with SBA alumnae, Benedictine sisters, and a handful of others. With only six chairs on stage and a large screen backdrop, the actors intimated scenes as described by the women who were interviewed. The result was the retelling of a powerful story of steadfastness in facing questions of meaning, faith, and gospel accountability that challenged thinking and instilled young women with a sense of their own worth and power.

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