



St. Benedict Academy
Alumnae Association
Newsletter
Winter 2021

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

Have an address change? Story to share? Idea to highlight your class in the newsletter? Email:

sbaalum@eriebenedictines.org

Recent Reunions

Class of '67

Members of the **SBA Class of '67** gathered for their annual class picnic on August 11 at Glenwood. After not being together since the 2019 Christmas Party, there was a lot of catching up to do! The class will celebrate their 55th reunion at the 2022 picnic, Wednesday, August 10. Information will come via e-mail, so if you have not been receiving e-mails, contact Janet Romanowicz Hammond, hammondjanet@hotmail.com.



Class of '76

The **SBA Class of '76** celebrated our 45th reunion on Saturday, August 21, at Presque Isle with 27 classmates from states including New York, Maryland and Colorado. We enjoyed a catered meal, a "Lassies Auction" (gift auction), a "Memories Table" of uniform parts, newsletters, yearbooks and more. We played games like "SBA Trivia" and a raffle for "Train" tickets. Everyone enjoyed catching up and reminiscing. The proceeds for the Lassies Auction will fund this year's Christmas basket donation and our next big reunion—our 50th.



Sitting: Barb Ditrich King, Beth Bruno Gawronski, Susan Pacinelli DiVecchio, Cathe Piorkowski Hedderick; First row: Debbie Stockman Lasko, Maureen Maloney Johannesmeyer, Leslie Phillips Borressen, Carol Holdnack, Cindy Andrzejczak Rettger, Jane Earll, Ann Pilewski, Patricia Rettger, Steph Heher, Barb Archacki Zdarko, Ruth Siatkowski Lowers, Carolyn O'Brien Carmosino, Diane Adkins-Tobin, Mary Beth Cermak Bell, Cathy Phillips, Darlene Webb Feeney, Jane Hogenmiller Steineck, Karen Kuchcinski Sonney; Top row: Cindy Anderson Tabolt, Jeanne Anderson Brady, Debbie Allen Parr, Nancy Szczutkowski Cross, Selena Laufenberg

*Let us pray for our SBA alumnae
who have passed into eternity—*

Kathleen M Alberstadt Nowak '44
Theresa Zuzula Steers '47
Priscilla F "Pat" Gallo Zasada '48
Irene B Haraburda Abbate '49
Carol Ann Sohl Mallozzi '53
Catherine Ann Danowski Peterson Mansfield '53
Cynthia Bentze Nitzczynski '56
Nancy A Martin Wells '56
Grace M Hann Howells '57
Patricia Ann Cieslak Parmarter '59
Annette Felice Schaal '59
Kathyleen Benes '61
Margaret Jane Walkiewicz '63
Clara Dachtyl Meyer '66
Linda Ciocco Gidos '67
Susan Wroblewski Horvat '72
Betsy Ann Weber Soboleski '73
Patrice M DiTullio '75

Generations of “Friends we never can forget”

*“We thank thee for
thy guiding care
And all we’ve learned
from thee”* –SBA school song

Creating community is in the DNA of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. One of the greatest testaments to this DNA is the enduring strength of the St. Benedict Academy Alumnae Association—even though the sisters closed St. Ben’s in 1988.

The first Benedictines arrived in Erie in 1856 to educate the children of German immigrants. In 1867 they opened St. Benedict Academy on East 9th Street. In response to the burgeoning Catholic population in the 1940s and 50s, they built a new high school building on East 10th Street that opened in 1955. By 1988, changes in the local population and in religious life made it financially impossible for the sisters to continue running the school and SBA closed its doors.

But the SBA community spirit wasn’t bound by the physical. Through the SBA Alumnae Association, it lives on in friendships, through reunions and parties, at bingos and fundraisers to support the sisters’ inner-city ministries.

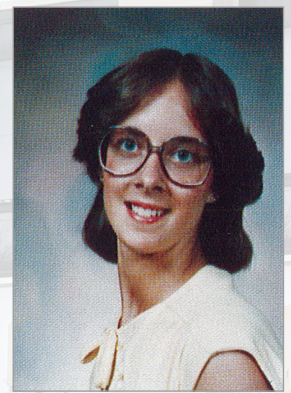
The first all-girls academy in Erie, in the course of its 121 year history many mothers and daughters and daughters of daughters went to SBA. Four mother-daughter pairs shared their experience of the character-shaping, friendship-building SBA spirit for this issue of *The Mount*. While graduating classes ceased to exist, graduates from the 1950s through the 1980s continue to influence family, friends, workplaces, the city of Erie and beyond.

SBA Alumnae Association Board, she plays a very active role in organizing the annual Christmas party and the bingo events where thousands of dollars have been raised to help support Benedictine ministries.

Darlene’s mother, Margaret Somjai Harkness, ’51, also formed lifelong friendships in her years at SBA. “Mom’s years at SBA nurtured her caring heart,” Darlene explained. “After graduation she enrolled in the St. Vincent School of Nursing and spent 45 years working in the St. Vincent Nursery and NICU, in addition to raising a family.”



Carol Fisher Kuna '56



Anne Marie Kuna Shiel '79

Like Darlene, Ann Kuna Shiel, ’79, named friendship the greatest gift of her time at St. Ben’s. “There was something about St. Ben’s—the teachers we loved, our friends—that made us feel special, that we belonged.” Ann’s faith was nurtured at the Academy, too, and it is still an important part of her life, something she has shared with her step-daughter and grandkids.

For the women who studied there, the quality of a St. Ben’s education mattered. Ann continued, “when I interviewed for my first job at Hamot, the interviewer looked at my application and asked, smiling, “You graduated from St. Ben’s?” “I said yes, and knew I was in. That was 42 years ago and I’m still with Hamot.”

Ann’s mother, Carol Fischer Kuna, ’56, confirmed that the lyrics of the school song, “friends we never can forget,” have proved true for her, too. She and her SBA friends have shared a lot of life since they graduated in 1956: “We’ve been through marriages, babies, divorces, ill health, become grandmothers...we’ve been there for each other, and our ‘club’ still meets regularly,” Carol said. “Ours was a neighborhood



Margaret Somjai Harkness '51



Darlene Harkness Kerstetter '82

“The greatest gift I received during my time at SBA was the joy of lifelong friendships,” said Darlene Harkness Kerstetter, ’82. “And the joy I get through volunteering began at SBA. I am grateful to be able to help the less fortunate in our community.” Darlene made this observation in the same breath as she spoke of the “caring community” at St. Ben’s. As president of the

*“With friends
we never can forget,
Who join us in our praise”*

community—we walked down Parade Street to school every day, our numbers growing as others joined us en route.”

Almost every day Carol uses skills she learned at SBA. “Sister Mary Philip Kiehlmeier taught us sewing and I am still sewing and quilting. I taught my granddaughter to quilt,” she said.

Carol’s mother, Ruth Welch Fischer, was also an SBA alum, Class of 1926.



Ruth Welch Fischer '26

Sue Skrzypczak Chase, '82, echoes the mantra of strong SBA friendships. A contributing factor that helped build those friendships was the sisters’ involving the students in the greater Erie community. “We walked from SBA to St. Stan’s for swimming lessons, to the gym at St. Mary’s, and we went to Camp Glinodo together. Then there was choral—we went all over the city to sing. We learned to love our community together,” Sue said.



Letitia Chimenti Skrzypczak '52



Susan Skrzypczak Chase '82

Add to that the excellent education and strong work ethic—“Businesses all around Erie recruited at SBA because we had such potential,” she remembers. “It’s how I got my first job.” Sue also spoke to the cultivation of a faith and prayer life at SBA. “We were grateful for what we had and we learned to give back, and we still do that today through the SBA Alumnae Association.”

Sue’s mother, Letitia Chimenti Skrzypczak, '52, remains in contact with a few SBA friends although some of her memories have faded. Letitia does remember, though, that when she was at SBA everyone was going to be a secretary—but even in that, there was a desire to excel. “Because of her own experience, mom knew I’d get a good education at SBA and that I’d have many more choices than she did,” Sue said.

“Not going to school with guys let our strengths as girls shine through. It was girls who filled all the roles, like class president or in sports, and all the resources were devoted to us,” said Marjorie Bolash Adamus, '82. “It made a positive difference.” And then there was the pride she felt in her SBA family. “My mom’s experience at SBA, her lifelong friendships, made me want to go there and be part of that family, even though most of my grade school friends went to a different school.”

Experiences outside the classroom, the connection with the larger community, stayed with Margie, too.

“My science classes with Sister Pat Lupo influenced me the most. I learned that science was bigger than the classroom when we went out into the neighborhood, or to Presque Isle.”

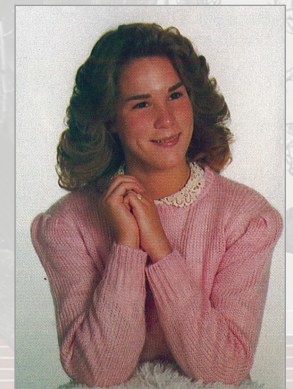
Anne Kaiser Bolash, '56, was a west side girl—SBA was on the east side of the city and most students were from the east side—but Anne was sent to SBA through a set of unusual circumstances and it made all the difference. “The sisters valued us as persons and wanted us to learn,” she said. “They taught us to be gracious and kind.”

The first three years at SBA, Anne was in the 9th Street building. “The new building on 10th Street opened for our senior year. We were top dog!” she said in describing the experience. They got their uniforms at Kraus’ Department Store and spent lunch time dancing in the old gym—“I loved to dance, and I learned to polka,” Anne recalled.

Prayer and Mass were an important part of the experience, too. “Sister Mary David Callahan had a group of us sing the Mass prayers. And we loved being part of her choral group, we sang all over the community, even once with the Erie Philharmonic,” Anne said, echoing the sense of belonging to the larger community.



Anne Kaiser Bolash '56



Marjorie Bolash Adamus '82

The presence of a monastery in a city should have far-reaching effects—it should be a leaven for the society in which it exists. Through decades of educating, respecting, challenging, and guiding generations of young women at St. Benedict Academy, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have indeed been a leaven. One would probably be hard-pressed to find a local business, company, a parish, school, or non-profit in Erie that somewhere in its history didn’t have a connection with a graduate of St. Ben’s. Generations of strong women, confident in their abilities, strong in their sense of friendship, and committed to the value of community and faith have been a leaven in Erie and beyond. Their legacy—the DNA they inherited at SBA—is now passed on through their lives.