

The Progress

Mount St. Dominic celebrates International Day of the Girl

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Mount St. Dominic Academy senior Ava Ciauro of North Caldwell speaks during an assembly celebrating International Day of the Girl.

CALDWELL – The students of Mount St. Dominic Academy marked the occasion of International Day of the Girl on Tuesday, Oct. 10, with a field trip to the United Nations.

“This year, at a time when we are seeing a range of movements and actions to curtail girls’ and women’s rights and roll back progress on gender equality, we see particularly harsh impacts on girls,” according to the United Nation’s website.

“From maternal health care and parenting support for adolescent mothers, to digital and life skills training;... to survivor support services and violence prevention programs; there is an urgent need for increased attention and resourcing for the key areas that enable girls to realize their rights and achieve their full potential,” it continues.

The theme of this year’s International Day of the Girl Summit was “Invest in Girls’ Rights: Our Leadership and Wellbeing.”

Christine Victori, who leads the Mount’s signature L.E.O. program, a two-year innovative and interactive class with a business curriculum focused on teaching leadership, entrepreneurship and opportunity, brought a group of 16 juniors and seniors to attend the summit.

The theme was chosen as a reminder that girls’ rights continue to be neglected with the message that girls are capable of being the leaders and voices of the future, shaping government policy and spending to inform the rules and norms businesses should use to operate, and direct the priorities for new research and innovations.

Secretary of Academics Ava Ciauro, a senior, of North Caldwell, was one of the students selected to attend the summit.

“The International Day of the Girl Child focuses attention on the need to address the challenges girls face and to promote girls’ empowerment and the fulfillment of their human rights,” she said. “Girls are breaking boundaries and barriers posed by stereotypes and exclusion, including those directed at children with disabilities and those living in marginalized communities.

“Achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment is integral,” she continued. “Only by ensuring the rights of women and girls will we get to justice and inclusion, economies that work for all, and sustaining our shared environment now and for future generations.”

Victor said she was “very impressed” with the what Ciauro and the other students were able to take away from their trip to the summit and implementing what they learned.

“It is so inspiring to see them want to change the world. I always say that in my world – they are changemakers,” she said.

Mount senior and Secretary of Inclusion Erin Araneta, of West Orange, was thrilled to be chosen as a chat moderator at the summit.

She asked participants questions pertaining to the live speakers’ discussion in the Zoom chat to stimulate conversations between virtual attendees across the globe.

She said it was so impactful to read global participants’ different insights about girls’ well-being and investing in girls’ leadership based on their individual experiences, “which are so vastly different from ours.” The experience solidified her strong belief in the importance of diversity of thought.

Poignant Assembly

On the same day, the entire school community attended an assembly featuring guest speaker Sarah Osembo, Co-Founder and CEO of Enda Athletic, Inc., who delivered a 40-minute talk.

Enda Athletic, Inc. is the first athletic performance footwear brand from Africa. To maximize positive social impact through sports, Osembo said she teamed up with her Co-Founder to create a brand that creates jobs, invests in local communities and spurs economic development. In addition, Osembo is from a town near Eldoret, Kenya, which is known as the City of Champions that has produced generations of the world's greatest distance runners.

She also started a sports academy in rural Kenya that provides sports proteges from disadvantaged backgrounds access to much-needed professional training without compromising their education.

Osembo told the audience that their leadership is crucial, but that they will not be able to "step into leadership" if they let "negative forces" get into their heads." She said you "really have to get to know yourself." She also advised the group to find good mentors.

During the question-and-answer segment, senior Gabby Chipelo of Nutley said she was so inspired by Osembo.

"The table itself is rigged, it was never meant for us," she said. "We need to recognize that the system was never going to be fair for us. It will never be equal, and because of that, we ultimately need to create a new table. Destroy the table we already have. Create a system that benefits everyone. We can all coexist at a table that's meant to represent who we all are."

Chipelo said she was also inspired by a quote by Shirley Anita Chisholm, an American politician, who in 1968, became the first black woman to be elected to the United States Congress, and is known for stating, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."