# MOMENTS

MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY

SUMMER 2025

## MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY CHEERLEADING TEAM



## MAKES HISTORY

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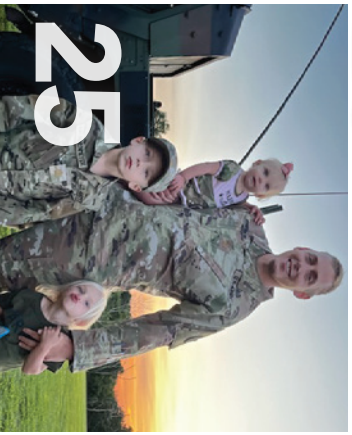
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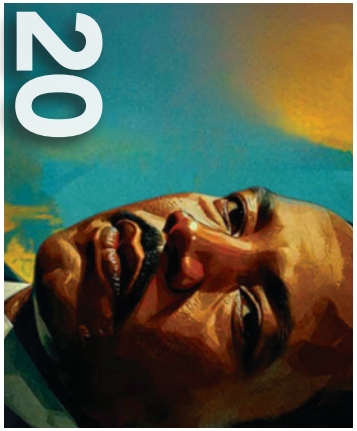
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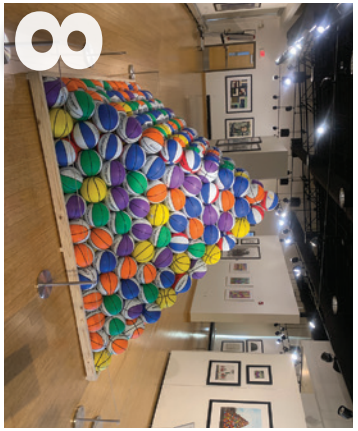
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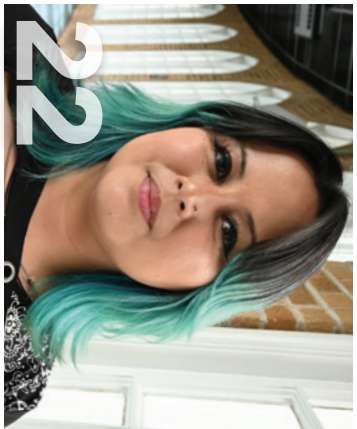



















# PRESIDENT DAN MYERS CHAMPIONS MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY ON THE NATIONAL STAGE

In 2025, Misericordia University President **Daniel J. Myers**, Ph.D., has been on-the-move—traveling coast to coast to connect with alumni, elevate the university's national profile, and shape the future of higher education policy.



One of the year's standout initiatives was the **'MU Mile Tour'**, a celebratory alumni engagement series across Florida. From scenic boat cruises in Naples to spirited gatherings in Tampa and Fort Pierce, Dr. Myers brought the Centennial Celebration directly to alumni, sharing updates on Misericordia's growth and vision. These events not only rekindled Cougar pride but also raised funds for scholarships and student programs, including the impactful Ruth Matthews Bourger Women with Children Program.

**Beyond alumni outreach**, Dr. Myers has been actively engaged in national and regional higher education leadership forums. He participated in the 2025 **Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) Presidents Meeting**, where Catholic university leaders explored mission integration, social justice, and the evolving role of mercy institutions in a changing world. Shortly after, he attended the **Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) Annual Meeting**, held in late January and early February, where discussions centered on Catholic identity, student belonging, and public policy challenges.

In March, Dr. Myers joined peers at the **Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania (AICUP)** meeting to advocate for state-level support of private higher education and to collaborate on strategies for enrollment and affordability.

He also brought his voice to the **CUPRAP Spring Conference**, a gathering of higher education marketing professionals from across the Mid-Atlantic. There, he shared insights on presidential engagement through social media, highlighting how authentic digital presence can strengthen institutional visibility and student connection.

Whether engaging alumni or shaping national dialogue, President Myers continues to position Misericordia University as a thought leader in higher education.



Misericordia University's Best Buddies chapter is part of a national organization that works to find a friend, or "buddy," for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Every chapter provides important support, social interaction, and an inclusive environment for adults in their communities between the ages of 18-26. Best Buddies has chapters in all 50 states.

**Isabella Davis** '25, a senior Speech-Language Pathology major, is the student president of Misericordia's chapter of the Best Buddies program. Davis said the program is very impactful for young adults in the community who have an IDD.

"If you have an intellectual or developmental disability, we can pair you up with one-on-one friendships with college students," said Davis.

Davis said the program reaches out to the community to spread awareness and gauge interest and then attempts to find the perfect match. Misericordia's chapter currently has ten matches. Interested adults need to apply at the beginning of the academic year, mainly to answer questions about personal preferences in order to facilitate the best match possible.

"In prior situations, people have told me they do not like loud sounds. So, any information they would want to share with me, I would look through the college students and see who I think might be a good match with them," said Davis.

If the matches work out, the program tries to carry them over to the following year to help develop the bond and maintain consistency. Davis said the program encourages matches to meet at least twice a month.

The program also holds a monthly event for the young adults and "buddies" in the program. The events are open to those not in the program; however, anyone interested in attending should contact Davis beforehand so that the environment can be carefully planned. Any student interested in joining Best Buddies should contact Davis by emailing davisi1@misericordia.edu or faculty advisor **Joanna Cunningham** by emailing jcunningham@misericordia.edu.



# HOMETOW



In February, the Misericordia University community gathered at the Toyota SportsPlex in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, for the Hometown Heroes Hockey Event. It honored local veterans, active-duty military personnel, and first responders — celebrating their unwavering dedication and service.

The evening started as the special guest guests assembled as a group. The arena resonated with patriotism during the recognition ceremony and the National Anthem that followed. The atmosphere was electric, uniting attendees in gratitude and respect.

**A highlight of the event was the ceremonial puck drop,** a symbolic gesture that marks the beginning of the game and pays tribute to the veterans and first responders. This year, it was presided over by 98-year-old World War II veteran **Charles "Charlie" Brooking**. Born in 1927 in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, Charlie enlisted in the U.S. Navy at the tender age of 17, with his father's consent. During the Asiatic-Pacific Theater operations as Gunner's Mate 2nd Class, he manned twin .50 caliber machine guns on PT boats, including the PT-223, PT-617, PT-619, and PT-621. Reflecting on his service, Charlie fondly recalls the close-knit nature of his 11-15 member PT boat crew as "a family." Even decades later, he cherishes visits to the PT Boat display at Battleship Cove in Fall River, Massachusetts, where the PT-617, one of his former vessels, is preserved.

The event also featured complimentary food served by Mission BBQ in the party rooms, fostering camaraderie among attendees. Various vendor tables lined the venue, including Cougar Prints offering MU merchandise, adjacent to representatives from the Admissions Department, The Insalaco Center for Leadership and Career Development, Campus Life, Air Force ROTC, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, providing information and resources to guests. A basket raffle was held, with proceeds benefiting a veteran's organization, further emphasizing the community's commitment to supporting those who have served.



# N HEROES

Adding to the significance of the evening, Congressman Robert Bresnahan, Jr. attended the event, mingling with veterans and active-duty heroes. His presence highlights the community's recognition of the sacrifices made by these individuals. In a social media post following the event, Congressman Bresnahan expressed his gratitude, stating, "Last night at Misericordia University's Hometown Heroes Hockey Event, we had an amazing time honoring our veterans and first responders."

The Hometown Heroes Hockey Event showcased more than the talents of the Misericordia University men's ice hockey team; it highlighted the sacrifices made by local heroes like Charlie Brooking and others. It was an evening filled with pride, remembrance, and unity, reinforcing the university's dedication to serving others and honoring those who do the same.





# Honoring a Legacy:

## *Marianna Gildea, RSM, Ph.D.*

### The First Recipient of Misericordia's McAuley Medal



During Misericordia's spring 2025 commencement, the university awarded its 24th McAuley Medal to Trustee Catherine McGroarty '74, RSM. In recognition of this honor, we profile the first recipient of Misericordia's highest award, Marianna Gildea, RSM, Ph.D. (1907–1997).

A member of the Class of 1928, Helen Rita Gildea was one of 15 graduates of College Misericordia's first four-year class. As a student, she held leadership positions in some of the university's earliest student activities and clubs. Her contributions were recognized by classmates and faculty alike: she was elected May Queen and honored at commencement as her class's valedictorian.

After receiving her Bachelor of Arts in Classical Languages, Helen entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1930 and professed her final vows in 1933. She joined Misericordia's faculty as Sister Marianna in 1934. She received both her master's degree and Ph.D. from The Catholic University of America in 1940 and 1943, respectively.




For more than 40 years, Sister Marianna served College Misericordia in numerous roles. She taught Romance languages and was academic dean from 1957 to 1967. After her tenure as dean, she founded and directed the Institute on Sacred Scripture and served in multiple administrative roles, including director of graduate studies and assistant director of admissions.

In 1980, at her golden jubilee, Sister Marianna was awarded the first-ever Catherine McAuley Medal by the College Misericordia Board of Trustees. Established in 1979, Misericordia's highest honor acknowledges significant service to others in the spirit of Catherine McAuley—the founder of the Sisters of Mercy—and a deep commitment to the university's ideals. Sister Marianna also received the Mother Catherine McGann Award from the Alumni Association in 1983 for professional accomplishment.

Gildea Hall was dedicated in her honor during Misericordia's 70th anniversary celebration in 1994.



# NEURODIVERSITY WORKSHOPS

Jenna Potter '22 and Chloe Tinklepaugh'22



**Jenna Potter '22** and **Chloe Tinklepaugh '22**, sixth-year doctoral students studying Occupational Therapy at Misericordia University, hosted a series of educational neurodiversity workshops for their capstone project. The workshops were geared towards raising awareness about neurodiversity and neurodivergent people in education and the workplace.

Neurodiversity refers to the natural and valuable variation in human brains and minds. It emphasizes that neurological differences, including those associated with conditions like autism and ADHD, are not deficits but rather unique strengths and perspectives.

Tinklepaugh hosted three workshops for employers from Northeastern Pennsylvania. Her workshops provided general education on neurodiversity and neurodivergent individuals, as well as individualized workplace analyses and training.

"It was an introduction to neurodiversity, neuro-friendly practices, autism, and intellectual disabilities," says Tinklepaugh. "I also included ADHD, because it is a part of neurodiversity. My participants said they see [ADHD] a lot in the workplace." During the trainings, Tinklepaugh stressed the best support practices for neurodivergent employees, which include visual aids, video modeling, and job coaches.

Potter ran a separate six-session neurodiversity training workshop for faculty on how best to support neurodivergent students. "It was about inclusivity and neurodiversity. We went through universal design for learning, sensory differences, communication, and challenging situations. Anything like that just to help make the classroom and campus environment a little more accessible and inclusive," said Potter.

Both Potter and Tinklepaugh say they will continue supporting neurodivergent individuals even after their capstone projects are done. Going into their projects, they knew there was a stigma associated with neurodiversity, but even they were surprised by the degree to which it's misunderstood. "We've realized throughout the capstone that it's even more stigmatized and more difficult to get the word out to advocate. So, it's not something that is our 14-week capstone project, and we are done with it. It's something that needs to be continued once we are licensed and practicing OTs," said Tinklepaugh.

# Friedman Art Gallery Basketball Exhibit Features Cultural Commentary with Real World Impact

The Pauly Friedman Art Gallery provided the Misericordia and Dallas communities with a stunning art exhibit and a free giveaway during the spring semester.

The exhibit, titled "Personal to Political: Celebrating the African American Artists of Paulson Fontaine Press," ran from February 1 to March 29 and featured cultural commentary about the societal issues facing African Americans. The exhibit featured both prints and architectural art centered around underrepresented voices.

The centerpiece of the exhibit was an aesthetically impressive pyramid consisting of 650 basketballs, which were distributed to children in the Dallas community during a giveaway on April 13. Families and organizations who serve children from the ages of 5-13 were invited, and the kids each received a basketball to take home with them.

Children who attended the basketball giveaway event were also invited to a free basketball clinic at the Anderson Sports and Health Center, which featured games and activities with members of the Misericordia men's and women's basketball teams.

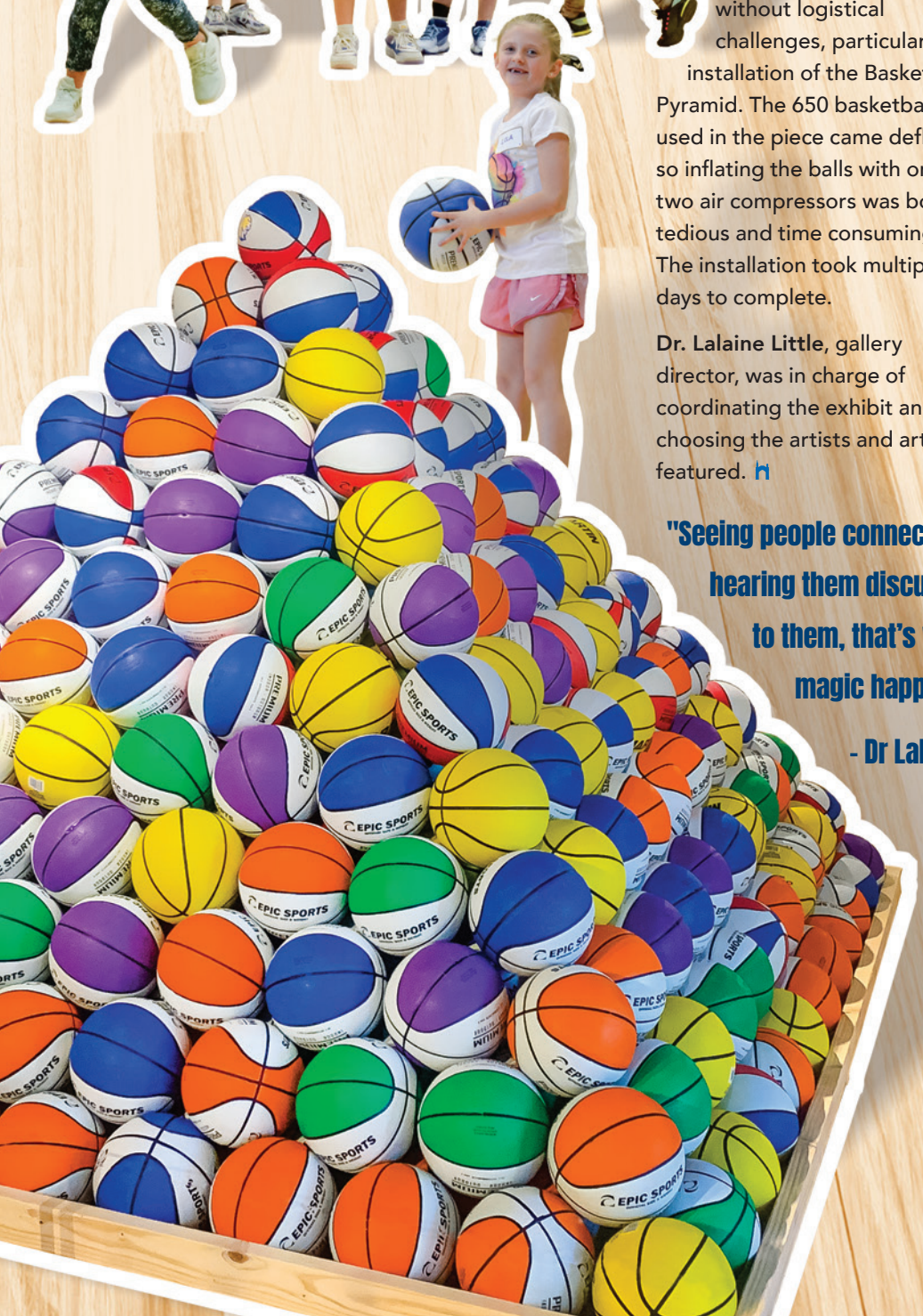
The Basketball Pyramid was the brainchild of San Francisco Bay area artist David Huffman. Huffman's inspiration for the pyramid came from his own basketball prints about the societal perceptions of black athletes, particularly his 2007 piece "Basketball Pyramid," which is a print version of the real-life basketball pyramid that was on display in the Friedman Gallery.




Photo credits:
David Huffman, Basketball Pyramid, 2011. Wood frame and 650 rubber basketballs. From Personal to Political: Celebrating the African American Artists of Paulson Fontaine Press, February 1 – March 29, 2025. Pauly Friedman Art Gallery, Misericordia University, 2025. Lalaine Little







The exhibit did not come without logistical challenges, particularly the installation of the Basketball Pyramid. The 650 basketballs used in the piece came deflated, so inflating the balls with only two air compressors was both tedious and time consuming. The installation took multiple days to complete.

**Dr. Lalaine Little**, gallery director, was in charge of coordinating the exhibit and choosing the artists and artwork featured.

**"Seeing people connect with the art, hearing them discuss what it means to them, that's when the real magic happens,"**

**- Dr Lalaine Little.**

# Students Embrace Mercy and Service During Immersion Trip to Jamaica

Seven Misericordia University students and two staff members traveled to Mandeville, Jamaica, for a week of service in January 2025. Their experiences volunteering in various communities left lasting impressions, reshaping their perspectives on mercy, service, and gratitude.

Throughout the week, the group engaged in charitable efforts, including visiting residents, supporting individuals affected by HIV/AIDS, and assisting families in need. They offered companionship and assistance at the Mary Help of Christians Home for the Elderly. Later in the week, they joined Sister Elizabeth N., ASN, in her outreach efforts.

For Emily Nicholson '26, the trip was about challenging herself.

"The majority of this trip, I was out of my comfort zone, being in settings I have never








*"I do not have to go all the way to Jamaica to make a difference."*

been in—I am proud of myself and how I handled my fears, and I am grateful to everyone on the trip and myself for going through this experience. I learned that Jamaica lives life on their terms and takes in everything around them," she shared.

The students also visited local schools, engaging with children and educators. Jamaica's strong sense of community struck Ashley Pitz '26. "Everyone was very welcoming and grateful that we were visiting. It seemed they were never in a rush but living in the present moment. Jamaica may be considered a poorer country, but it is rich in community and peace," she reflected.

Samantha Piekutowski '25 initially joined the trip after encouragement from a friend. A quote displayed at the Bishop Boyle Outreach and Resource Center deeply resonated with her: "Happy people do not have the best of everything. Happy people make the best of everything they have."

"This quote really impacted me because, as someone who struggles to live in the present moment, this grounded me," she said.

For Skylar Bianchi '25, the biggest lesson was about the power of presence.

"I have learned how much simply being present and showing up for someone can truly mean. Giving back is not just about material things—it is about offering your time, presence, and wholehearted attention. I have come to understand that the greatest gift you can give is to see and appreciate someone genuinely," she shared.

In addition to service, the trip concluded with a visit to Frenchman's Beach, where the group celebrated their journey. The students left Jamaica with a deeper understanding of gratitude and service.



*"I can also make a difference in my own neighborhood."*

*- Samantha Piekutowski '25*

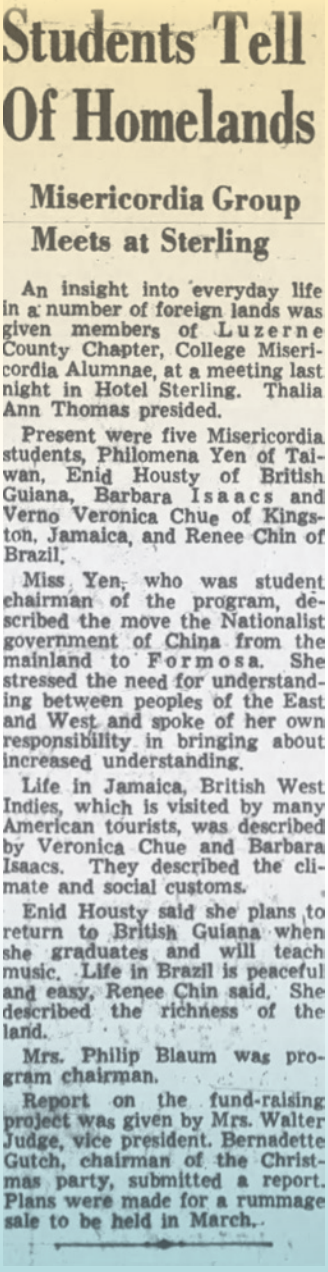
# Global Understanding




Major and Planned Gift Officer Joe Musto '04, '07, shared campus news while visiting Philomena Yen Avona '60 in February.

The October 1957 edition of Misericordia's Miss Recordia student newspaper announced the arrival of **Philomena Yen Avona** '60 to the Back Mountain campus. Born in China in 1936, Philomena and her family fled to Taiwan when she was 13. She graduated from Taipei Girls' High School and spent two years at Sacred Heart College in Tokyo, Japan. There, she saw a listing of U.S. colleges that offered scholarships, leading to her 6,700-mile journey to study in Dallas, Pennsylvania.

From her living room in Scottsdale, Arizona, the spry 88-year-old says the lure of living in America and the opportunity to receive a scholarship inspired her to apply to the all-girls college in the Northeast, sight unseen. "I did not know anything about Misericordia and did not speak English very well, but they gave me a scholarship," says Philomena "That was all I needed to know. When I got there, everyone was so kind and welcoming. The girls would take me to their homes for the



**Students Tell Of Homelands**

**Misericordia Group Meets at Sterling**

An insight into everyday life in a number of foreign lands was given members of Luzerne County Chapter, College Misericordia Alumnae, at a meeting last night in Hotel Sterling. Thalia Ann Thomas presided.

Present were five Misericordia students, Philomena Yen of Taiwan, Enid Housty of British Guiana, Barbara Isaacs and Verno Veronica Chue of Kingston, Jamaica, and Renee Chin of Brazil.

Miss Yen, who was student chairman of the program, described the move the Nationalist government of China from the mainland to Formosa. She stressed the need for understanding between peoples of the East and West and spoke of her own responsibility in bringing about increased understanding.

Life in Jamaica, British West Indies, which is visited by many American tourists, was described by Veronica Chue and Barbara Isaacs. They described the climate and social customs.

Enid Housty said she plans to return to British Guiana when she graduates and will teach music. Life in Brazil is peaceful and easy, Renee Chin said. She described the richness of the land.

Mrs. Philip Blaum was program chairman.

Report on the fund-raising project was given by Mrs. Walter Judge, vice president. Bernadette Gutch, chairman of the Christmas party, submitted a report. Plans were made for a rummage sale to be held in March.





holidays since I was so far from my family." Her favorite memories include spending summers with friends Jane **Fecko Kenny** '60 and **Dorene Rohne Cahill** '60 in waitressing jobs at the New Jersey shore.

She vividly remembers joining students from Haiti, Peru, and China on campus and together making a concerted effort to bring global understanding to the region. Numerous newspaper clippings in the Misericordia archives detail their efforts, such as presenting talks about their homelands to Misericordia's Luzerne County alumnae chapter and the Wyoming Valley United Nations Association.

Philomena served as a translator when businessmen from Japan toured the area as guests of the U.S. State Department and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce.

She graduated in 1960 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and moved to New York City to start her career in social work with Catholic Charities. She met and married her late husband, Vincent, and had two children, Paul and Elizabeth. Philomena and Vincent lived for many years in Ohio before retiring to Arizona. They were married for 52 years before he passed away in 2013.

Her Misericordia Class of 1960 is known for maintaining alumni connections, including a round-robin letter that has circulated for years between Philomena and a group of classmates, including **Dorothy 'Dot' Brown** '60, Hong Kong-native **Louisa King Chu** '60, and **Louise 'Ginger' Kirk Nelson** '60, as well as late friends **Martha Hanlon**, RSM '60, **Carol Banko Silver** '60, and **Carol Bessette** '60.

"My time at Misericordia was wonderful," Philomena says. "We came away duty bound and have the Misericordia influence and that of the Sisters of Mercy guiding us all our lives. I am forever grateful to Misericordia for giving me the life-changing opportunity."

An old article titled Japanese Learn of Valley's Industrial Program



Japanese Learn Of Valley's Industrial Program

Eleven Japanese business men from Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, toured Greater Wilkes-Barre today as guests of the Chamber

Percy A. Brown's. In the foreground are two Formosan students of College Misericordia Anna Chu and Philomena Ye who acted as interpreters. Others joined Wilkes-Barreans who included J. Harry



Misericordia Girls To Discuss United Nations

Wyoming Valley United Nations Association will sponsor a program highlighting the work of the United Nations tomorrow at 8:15 p. m. in the First Presbyterian Church.

The four girls are students at College Misericordia and will discuss their experiences and knowledge of United Nations

—Wayne Lance Photo

governmental organization, composed of indi

*Story and photo clippings courtesy of The Times Leader Media Group.*



# TWO GENERATIONS, ONE MISSION: A 25 YEAR REFLECTION

## RUTH MATTHEWS BOURGER WOMEN WITH CHILDREN PROGRAM

Misericordia University maintains a national leadership position in higher education support for single mothers and their children, thanks to the Ruth Matthews Bourger Women with Children Program (WWC). As the only university-based residential program of its kind in Pennsylvania and one of only eight in the country, WWC has grown from a bold idea into a national model of educational and social transformation. Here are some of the program's defining milestones and its impact.

### NATIONAL RECOGNITION

- **2020–2024:** WWC receives national recognition as the recipient of the prestigious Generation Hope's Family U Seal and ranked yearly by Best Colleges, as a top five program in the United States
- **2021:** Named Outstanding Student Parent Program by NASPA, higher ed's largest student affairs organization.
- WWC has been featured in The New York Times, U.S. News & World Report, NPR's StoryCorps, and The Today Show.

25th ANNIVERSARY

*Silver Soirée*

CELEBRATING
THE RUTH MATTHEWS BOURGER
WOMEN WITH CHILDREN PROGRAM

*Save the Date*

**In celebration of this incredible legacy, Misericordia University invites you to the 25th Anniversary Soirée for the Ruth Matthews Bourger Women with Children Program.**

**Saturday, September 13, 2025**
**Irem Temple Country Club, Dallas, PA**

**Mark your calendar for a formal evening of reflection, gratitude, and celebration of the lives transformed by this groundbreaking program. More details to come; we hope you can join us for this formal affair.**

## **2000:** WWC IS FOUNDED

The program was launched by **Jean Messaros, RSM,** '73 and Misericordia leadership with the vision of providing single mothers living in or near poverty with the opportunity to earn a degree while raising their children in a safe, supportive environment. The first home, Rasmussen House, opened with space for four families.

## **2007-2016:** GROWTH AND EXPANSION

WWC expanded in 2007 with the addition of Pauly House, followed by Moffat House in 2016. With each new residence came the ability to support more families, increasing the program's capacity from 6 to 16 single-mother households. This period also marked the strengthening of partnerships with local childcare providers, school districts, and agencies offering housing subsidies and nutrition support.

RUTH MATTHEWS BOURGER WOMEN WITH CHILDREN PROGRAM

*25th Anniversary*

## **2019:** STATEWIDE RECOGNITION AND POLICY IMPACT

The success of the WWC program caught the attention of Pennsylvania leaders when Governor **Tom Wolf** announced the launch of the Parent Pathways Initiative, a bold, state-wide effort to improve access to higher education and high-skill trades for families in poverty. The WWC program model inspired Parent Pathways following a series of in-depth site visits to Misericordia by then State Secretary of Human Services **Teresa Miller**. The WWC's holistic, two-generation approach to education and family support became the foundation for what the state hopes to replicate statewide. Backed by substantial grant funding, the initiative continues today under Governor **Josh Shapiro's** leadership.

## **2020:** PERSEVERANCE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the program continued its mission. In 2020, six women with eight children graduated as the largest cohort in program history at the time. All graduates entered professional careers or graduate programs immediately following degree completion.

## **2022:** ANNE'S HOUSE OPENS

WWC reached full capacity with the opening of Anne's House, bringing the total number of homes to four and the number of families served to 20. At this point, WWC had become the largest residential program for single mothers in higher education in the state of Pennsylvania.

## **2021-2024:** PARENT PATHWAYS OF NEPA

Inspired by the WWC model, the Robin Hood Foundation's Poverty Mobility Lab selected WWC as the blueprint for a regional replication initiative. Under the direction of Katherine Pohlidal, WWC director, the program led the development of Parent Pathways of Northeastern Pennsylvania, launched in 2022 with $1.7 million in grant funding. This followed Governor Wolf's 2019 Parent Pathways Initiative, which allocated $2.5 million in grant funding to promote statewide replication of WWC's success.

## MOVING FORWARD

As of the 2024-25 academic year, 48 families have graduated from the WWC program, with 100% placement in professional careers and graduate school. The two-generation, WWC program model continues to inspire replication throughout the state of Pennsylvania, while influencing the national conversation on student parents and access to higher education. And through the continued remarkable leadership of WWC Director, **Katherine Pohlidal**, and WWC Coordinators, **Sandy Johnson**, and **Kristi Lyons**, the program remains at the forefront of higher education programming and innovation for student parents; further cementing Misericordia's position as a regional and national leader. Ultimately, the Bourger WWC program remains at the epi-center of our university's institutional mission to serve the underserved, and in alignment with that legacy, a contemporary testament to the dedication of redefining the narrative of poverty toward a life of prosperity through academic excellence, two-generations at a time.










# MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY CHEERLEADING SHINES IN FLORIDA

The Misericordia University cheerleading team made history this season, earning national and international recognition after standout performances at the 2025 UCA College Nationals and the World Cup Cheerleading Championship in Florida.

At UCA College Nationals in Orlando, Florida, the team advanced to the finals for the first time in several years with their traditional routine—an achievement that marked a milestone in the program's evolution. Just days later, they delivered their strongest performance yet, securing first place at the World Cup Cheerleading Championship.






The success is the culmination of decades of dedication and growth under the leadership of Head Coach **Tara Sinclair**, '01 who took over the program in 2001. What began as a small, all-girl squad with just 11 members—ending that first season with only eight—has grown into a dynamic, competitive team of 36 athletes, including one male, returning the program to its coed roots.

**"Cheerleading is highly team-oriented," said Sinclair. "Every athlete plays a crucial role, and it's about more than just skill–it's about trust and chemistry."**

A turning point for the program came in 2012 with the launch of the Misericordia football team, which provided a larger stage for cheerleaders to showcase their athleticism. Increased visibility, coupled with viral social media clips of the team's high-energy routines, began attracting athletes specifically seeking a competitive cheer experience.

The team now divides into groups for sideline cheer, game-day performances, and traditional competition routines. They trained intensively over winter break, refining their routines through repetition and community showcases before taking the mat in Florida.

"This year, we didn't want our first full-out performance to be at nationals," Sinclair explained. "So we performed it locally under pressure—it gave our athletes valuable experience."

The coaching staff, comprised entirely of program alumni, plays a key role in sustaining the culture of trust and unity that defines Misericordia cheer.

For Sinclair, the true victory goes beyond trophies. "Titles are incredible, but our legacy is about more than competition. It's about perseverance, growth, and lifting each other up."

As the team reflects on a historic season, they do so as more than just champions. They are a family—one built on resilience, passion, and pride.



# NAVY VETE TRAILBLAZ & PROUD A

## REFLECTS ON MISERICORDIA JOURNEY

For **Jim Liberski** '80 of Exeter, Pennsylvania, earning his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from College Misericordia in 1980 was more than just a personal achievement — it was a life-changing milestone that opened doors to career advancement, personal growth, and lasting friendships. He was also the first in his family to earn a four-year degree — a proud distinction that added even more meaning to his accomplishment.

Born and raised in Hudson, a section of Plains Township, Liberski graduated high school in 1968 and enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He served on active duty as a radio communications and teletype specialist, with assignments across the United States, in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and aboard the USS Springfield, stationed in Italy.

After returning home, Liberski earned an associate's degree from the Wilkes-Barre Business College and began working full-time at the Tobyhanna Army Depot in electrical repair. However, he had a bigger goal in mind — a four-year degree. He enrolled in College Misericordia's pioneering Weekender Program, using the GI Bill to fund his education while continuing to work full-time.

"I was not your typical high school-to-college person," Liberski said. "I wanted to achieve it, and it was just a great feeling for me — and I am glad I did it."

Liberski completed his degree in 1980 but received his cap and gown during the 1981 commencement ceremony — a moment that made it all feel official. He credits his bachelor's degree for helping him earn two promotions at Tobyhanna before retiring. "I did pretty good for myself," he said with a smile.

At the heart of Jim's experience was Mary Glennon, RSM, who served as director — and later dean — of continuing education during his time in the Weekender Program. The late Sister Mary went on to become vice president of Academic Affairs in her subsequent years at Misericordia.



**"She was my rock while I was there,"** Liberski recalled. "We became very good friends."

Sister Mary was known not only for her academic leadership but also for the personal attention and encouragement she gave to each non-traditional student. For Jim, her support extended far beyond the classroom — she was a mentor, advocate, and source of constant reassurance.

Returning to campus recently during Misericordia's Centennial celebration brought a flood of memories to Jim. "It jogged my memory quite a bit," he said. "That was very, very enjoyable — to see how the campus has grown. The students were friendly, it was great — and a great experience overall."

Now retired, Jim enjoys spending time with his family and grandson, reflecting fondly on a path that was uniquely his own — marked by service, dedication, and a deep sense of pride.

Misericordia still serves veterans today. Some are enrolled using their veterans benefits, like Jim did, while others are just at the beginning of their military careers as full-time traditional undergraduates in both the Air Force and Army ROTC programs.

# RAN, ER, LÚM

"I WAS NOT YOUR TYPICAL HIGH SCHOOL-TO-COLLEGE PERSON, I WANTED TO ACHIEVE IT, AND IT WAS JUST A GREAT FEELING FOR ME — AND I AM GLAD I DID IT."

-JIM LIBERSKI '80



# MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES MLK WEEK 2025

## *with Reflection, Service, and Social Justice*

Misericordia University honored the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a week-long series of events in January, focused on reflection, service, and social justice. This year's theme, "Embody the Vision: It Starts With Me," encouraged students, faculty, and staff to reflect on their role in fostering change within their communities. Organized by the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office and Campus Ministry, the celebration provided opportunities for meaningful engagement, learning, and dialogue.

The week began with "Conversations for Change: A Fireside Chat with Emerald Garner," featuring social justice advocate Emerald Garner, daughter of the late Eric Garner. In a compelling discussion, Garner emphasized the importance of personal responsibility in advancing Dr. King's vision, calling on attendees to take action in addressing systemic issues and promoting equity and justice in their daily lives. She shared her personal experiences and the challenges of advocacy, inspiring the Misericordia community to use their voices and influence to drive change.

**"Voices of Strength:** *A Panel on the Black Male Experience"*






Another highlight of the week was "Voices of Strength: A Panel on the Black Male Experience," led by members of the United Black Brothers (UBB). The panel provided a powerful platform for discussing the experiences of Black men in society, with panelists exploring topics such as mentorship, allyship, and the importance of fostering inclusive environments. The discussion emphasized how collective support and understanding can help empower marginalized voices and break down barriers to equality.

In addition to these thought-provoking discussions, the week included a campus-wide social justice presentation, where participants examined historical and contemporary issues of racial and social justice. A documentary screening and guided discussion provided further insight into the ongoing struggle for equality, encouraging attendees to reflect on how they can contribute to a more just society.

A prayer service created space for the campus community to come together in remembrance and reflection, while a service initiative gave students the opportunity to actively engage with the local community. Through volunteerism, participants put Dr. King's message of service into action, reinforcing Misericordia's core values of mercy, service, justice, and hospitality.

By engaging in these impactful programs, the Misericordia community reaffirmed its commitment to Dr. King's vision of justice, equality, and service. The events served as a reminder that change begins with individuals and that "Embody the Vision: It Starts With Me" is more than a theme—it is a call to action that continues beyond the week's celebrations.






# MISERICORDIA:

## The Place that Helped Me Rewrite My Story

By: Paloma B. Parreno, Mass Communications and Design major, Class of 2025

When I left Southern California to attend Misericordia University, I didn't know what I was walking into, only what I was walking away from. I applied to the Ruth Matthews Bourger Women with Children Program to build a better life for myself and my son. I was barely getting by at the time, living paycheck to paycheck. I had to leave college during the pandemic, and honestly, I didn't think getting my degree would ever be possible. But Misericordia gave me more than a second chance; it gave me a future.

I'd never been part of a community like this before. From day one, I felt the difference. Misericordia is a small university, but the support here is enormous. Whether it's a professor walking me through an assignment or a staff member offering a kind word in the hallway, I've been surrounded by people who genuinely care not just about my academic success but about me as a person and mother.

The charisms of Mercy, Service, Justice, and Hospitality aren't just words on a brochure here. They are lived out every day across this campus.

Mercy has shown up in the most personal ways. I've had professors who didn't just accommodate my needs; they listened, encouraged me, and made space for me to succeed without making me feel like a burden. They saw the full picture of who I was and extended grace in moments I needed it most. That kind of understanding created a safe space for me to grow academically and personally.

Service is everywhere on this campus. It's in how students rally together for causes that matter, how organizations step up to help each other, and how the Women with Children Program is run by people who are deeply committed to making education accessible for student-parents like me. Their work has allowed me to focus on my studies, build a future, and still be present for my child.

Justice at Misericordia is about more than fairness; it's about voice. I've had the opportunity to be involved in student organizations that elevate underrepresented communities and advocate for change. It's empowering to be part of an environment that doesn't just acknowledge my identity but uplifts it, giving me space to celebrate being Latina and a single mom. I've been encouraged to speak up, tell my story, and take part in making this campus more inclusive.

And then there's Hospitality, something I didn't know I'd been missing until I found it here. I've taken my son to the Banks Student Life Center and Archie's and watched him play in a space where I knew he was safe and welcomed. We've attended family-friendly events together on campus, and I've never felt like I had to choose between being a student and being a mom. On days when his school

MERCY SERVICE JUSTICE

was closed or had shortened hours, my son came with me to class and sat at an empty desk, doing his work while I did mine. My professors welcomed him without hesitation. That kind of warmth and acceptance makes a world of difference for someone like me, and it's one of the many reasons Misericordia feels like home.

The lasting impact of Misericordia is hard to put into words, but I feel it every day. I've grown into a better student, a more confident woman, and a more hopeful mother. I've found my voice in the classroom, in student leadership, and in my major. I've built relationships that will stay with me long after graduation. Most importantly, I've shown my son what resilience and transformation look like because of the opportunities this university gave me.

Misericordia didn't just help me earn a degree. It gave me the space to rebuild my life with dignity, purpose and a sense of belonging. That's a gift I'll carry with me always.



# HOSPITALITY

# MISERICORDIA SPOTLIGHT
## STAFF AND FACULTY



## Colleen Duffy, Ed.D.

**CHAIR, TEACHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AND ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR, GRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION**

**WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING AT THE UNIVERSITY?**

I love being a part of our learning community. Misericordia provides so many opportunities for me to develop personally and professionally. Sharing diverse perspectives with colleagues, collaborating on research projects, and engaging with peers on campus and in our surrounding community helps me grow. I also value the many events and programs that Misericordia offers, there is always something new to do and someone new to meet.

**WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU HAVE WORKED ON DURING YOUR TENURE?**

I am most proud of our Teacher Education students/alumni and the far-reaching impact they have on children in Pennsylvania classrooms. I believe teachers truly can make a difference in the lives of children, and I believe that Misericordia produces the *best* teachers!



## Jim Roberts

**CHIEF OF STAFF**

**WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING AT THE UNIVERSITY?**

A sense of comradery is evident. Talented people work here. They are friendly and supportive. We have fun collaborating on major projects or sharing a meal and some laughs. Maybe the modern workforce is destined to be different; however, no matter how it evolves, I hope that there is always a "Misericordia" with a sense of community.

**WHAT PROJECT(S) ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF THAT YOU HAVE WORKED ON DURING YOUR TENURE?**

Two projects stand out. I was a co-chair in the university status process from 2005 to 2007. Vision, strategic planning, and operations aligned perfectly. The campus was energized. We introduced a new brand, new majors, realigned into colleges, and became optimistic about the future. My service on CougarCare during the pandemic also stands out. Our group met twice a day. Our leaders were great, and as a team, we were focused in the face of chaos.



## Lieutenant Colonel Scott Brunnenmeyer '04:

# A Vanguard in Service and Leadership

**Lieutenant Colonel Scott Brunnenmeyer**, a 2004 graduate of Misericordia University, has carved a remarkable path in both his military and civilian careers. As the first Army ROTC graduate from Misericordia, Brunnenmeyer has not only achieved significant milestones but also exemplified the values of dedication and service.

Brunnenmeyer's journey to Misericordia began with a simple desire for a day off from high school. His track coach, Bill Reznak, who is still a teacher in the Crestwood (PA) School District, invited him to visit the campus. Initially, Brunnenmeyer had his sights set on Penn State, but after visiting Misericordia, he decided to enroll here. Reflecting on his decision, he candidly admits, "I was an 18-year-old kid looking for a day off school."

During his freshman year at Misericordia, Brunnenmeyer enlisted in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, joining Bravo Battery of the 109th Field Artillery as a 13 Bravo. His commitment to both his education and military training required careful coordination with his professors, who accommodated his schedule. "The school was very supportive, allowing me to take finals early and return late from basic training," he recalls. "I enjoyed the personal attention and relationships I found at Misericordia."

Balancing academics, sports, and a part-time job at Sears, Brunnenmeyer demonstrated resilience and determination. A chance encounter over a lawnmower purchase with Major Bill Ramsey (ret.) of the local Army ROTC got Brunnenmeyer thinking about opportunities as an officer. Despite initial reluctance, Brunnenmeyer eventually embraced the opportunity, turning down ROTC scholarships to keep his options open.

Upon commissioning as a Second Lieutenant in May 2004, Brunnenmeyer joined the 109th Field Artillery. Concurrently, he began his career at Sundance Vacations, headquartered in Wilkes-Barre Township, PA. The company's supportive environment allowed him to balance his military duties and civilian job seamlessly. "The owners treated me like family, supporting my deployments and even attending my deployment party," he shares. He also stresses the financial support from the PA National Guard as a key factor in helping him, and current college students, pay for tuition.

Brunnenmeyer's military career saw him rise to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, commanding the 109th Field Artillery and deploying twice to Iraq. His leadership and dedication earned him respect and admiration from both his military peers and civilian colleagues. "Being part of a small company with a family-like atmosphere made all the difference," he notes.

As the Army reorganizes to prepare for modern threats, the 109th Field Artillery, one of the oldest units in the Army dating back to 1775, will undergo structural changes. The unit will transition to a division artillery, known as DIVARTY, under the Pennsylvania 28th Division. Brunnenmeyer reflects on the unit's rich history, "Our honors and lineage date back to the Revolutionary War. It's an incredible heritage."

Brunnenmeyer's commitment to service extends beyond his professional life. He is devoted father and husband to spouse Jennifer and to three children: Jaxson, Isabelle, and Kennedy. Balancing family life with his demanding roles, he exemplifies the values of leadership and dedication.

Lieutenant Colonel Scott Brunnenmeyer's journey from a high school student seeking a day off to a respected military leader and successful civilian professional is a testament to his unwavering commitment and resilience. As the first ROTC graduate from Misericordia and the last to command the 109th Field Artillery, his legacy will inspire future generations of Misericordia alumni.



Bridget Hughes Carney, the Carney scholarship namesake, and Patrick Carney are shown seated front row on their 50th wedding anniversary in 1911, flanked by daughters, Bridget Carney O'Brien, the O'Brien scholarship namesake; Honora Sheerin, Mary Maher, and sons, John, James, Carney Scholarship benefactor; Frank and Michael.

## Misericordia selects two

# O'Brien Awards as 2025 Honored Scholarships

### Alumna spreads mercy around the world and honors family with two scholarships



Helen T. O'Brien '68

**Helen Theresa O'Brien** '68 never had the opportunity to take service trips as a student at Misericordia University (MU). However, her years of caring for family and friends, her Catholic faith, and her 31 years as a family and consumer sciences teacher and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America advisor in the Crestwood School District taught her the importance of servant leadership.

She continues to inspire young people by serving as a benefactor for two endowed scholarships at Misericordia University. The Bridget Carney Scholarship is an endowed scholarship established by Helen's great uncle James Kearney, M.D., in 1972 in honor of his mother, Bridget Hughes Carney. It is awarded annually to help Misericordia attract and retain the best and the brightest students, with preference given to students whose parents are or were members of St. Ignatius Loyola Parish, Kingston.

When the Sisters of Mercy came to the Wyoming Valley in 1875 to serve the impoverished, sick, and uneducated, they found many Irish Catholic families like the Carneys who greatly benefited from the founding of Misericordia. Two of Bridget's grandchildren became Sisters of Mercy. Two were employed for many years at the college, and at least nine of her family members graduated from MU between 1935 and 1970. Dr. Kearney's endowment has helped ensure that local students like **Elizabeth Azarewicz** '23, who received the Carney Scholarship from 2019 to 2023, are afforded the same opportunities as his family members enjoyed, which Helen gladly supports.

The second award, the F.J. O'Brien Family Campus Ministry Servant Leadership Scholarship, was established in 2016 and is named in memory of Helen's paternal grandparents, Francis J. and Bridget Carney O'Brien. Awarded annually, it helps students offset the cost of participating in university-sponsored service trips around the globe or attending the Dublin Young Mercy Leaders Conference held in Ireland.

In honor of the impact scholarship philanthropy has on students' lives, the two scholarships have been named the Misericordia University Honored Scholarships for 2025. The two scholarships are symbolic of the more than 300 scholarships Misericordia awards each year, and the benefactors who make educational dreams come true. Helen and the two scholarships were recognized at a luncheon hosted by President **Daniel J. Myers**, Ph.D., in April 2025.

**Jiselle Rodriguez**, '25, of Scranton, credits the O'Brien



Four O'Brien Family Scholarship recipients were among the guests at the Honored Scholarships luncheon in April. Shown, from left, are Keyla Carrasco '27, Karla Carrasco '25, President Daniel J. Myers, Ph.D., Helen T. O'Brien '68, honoree; Siwar Abdo '25 and Sahara Perez '28.



O'Brien Family Scholarship recipients Jiselle Rodriguez '25, left, and Siwar Abdo '25, helped put a roof on a Habitat for Humanity home in North Carolina.

"It is my hope to perpetuate the tenet of Service fostered by the Sisters of Mercy and make it easier for future Misericordia students to share their time and talent with those who need it most around the world." - *Helen T. O'Brien '68*

Scholarship with fueling a drive within her to make service a part of her life. A biology major in the Pre-Physician Assistant program, Jiselle received the O'Brien Family Scholarship, which helped fund her first campus service outing, a Habitat for Humanity trip to North Carolina. "I had never done any hands-on work before, so I learned construction, roofing, and landscaping. Best of all, I saw how the smallest acts of kindness can change someone's life. It really changed my perspective on service," she says.

Not only has Jiselle gone on three additional Misericordia service trips – to New Orleans, San Diego, and Texas – she has an impressive litany of campus activities, all of which serve the greater good. Her resume includes volunteering as a Mercy Leader, Kids on Campus Leader, and Pre-Professional Health Organization for Pre-med Leader, among others, while being employed as a Community Assistant for McHale Hall. It is no surprise that she plans a career in medicine.

Equally inspiring, Helen earned her bachelor's degree in home economics from Misericordia in 1968, and her master's degree in Man Environment Relations at Penn State University. She completed certification in cooperative education, as well as additional courses in computer technology and family consumer science (FSC) at Cornell, Temple, and Wilkes Universities. A certified American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) professional, she also worked for Penn State University in extension education and as an instructor in family finance. Retiring from Crestwood in 2001, Helen continued for several years supervising FCS student teachers part-time for Marywood University. Today, she serves as a Eucharistic minister and is active in her parish and with several non-profit community organizations.

A dedicated and philanthropic Misericordia alumna, Helen is also a Mercy Associate. In 2014, she participated in a Catherine McAuley Retreat in Dublin, Ireland and as a dedicated genealogy researcher, she also visited the Carney/Hughes homestead in Milltown, County Mayo. She also accompanied the St. Ignatius Loyola parish youth group on two trips serving Habitat for Humanity in West Virginia.

Individuals who would like to contribute to the Bridget Carney and F. J. O'Brien Family Campus Ministry Servant Leadership scholarships are invited to go online to www.misericordia.edu/makeagift, or contact **Joe Musto** '04, '07 in the Misericordia University Advancement Office at (570) 674-6356.

# SAVE THE DATE!

# Homecoming Reunion 2025










## FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, TO SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

We're honoring MU Reunion classes ending in 0s and 5s, the Class of 2024 returning for their first reunion, the May Class of 2025 for their ½ reunion, and the 50th Reunion Class of 1975 as they are inducted into the Golden Anniversary Club.

Stay tuned for celebration details, and visit misericordia.edu/MUHOCO

**– BECAUSE MU IS PART OF YOU! –**

# MISERICORDIA ALUMNI EVENTS 2025!

## MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY MILE TOUR

### JUNE 19 | LONG ISLAND, NY

**Register online today at: misericordia.edu/MMTLongIsland**

### JULY 24 | LEHIGH VALLEY, PA

**Register online today at: misericordia.edu/LehighValley**

Get ready to make unforgettable memories this summer with **Misericordia Alumni & Friends**. We'll be getting on the road soon and we just might be coming to a city near you.

Don't miss your chance to connect with MU Alumni & Friends! Visit **misericordia.edu/AlumniEvents** to stay updated on additional stops or to RSVP for an event near you.

## CHEERS TO ALUMNI VOLUNTEERS

### THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2025, FROM 6:00 TO 8:00 PM.

Calling all MU alumni volunteers to help celebrate with the December Graduating Class of 2025. It's your chance to make a difference for the next generation of MU Alumni. Share your wisdom, favorite memories, and help our soon-to-be graduates practice their networking skills and win some amazing prizes. RSVP online by Monday, November 17 at **misericordia.edu/MUCheersVolunteer.**



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