

# Marian Catholic ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



MAY 2020

## '73 GRAD FOCUSED ON 'DOING THE RIGHT THING'

For **Russell "Rooster" Valentini**, Class of 1973, the early years of Marian Catholic High School, played an important role in what turned out to be a career in which he impacted thousands of lives. Recently retired from the Allentown School District, Rooster has come to be a household name throughout the Lehigh Valley, a true hero for the great work he did there for 35 years.

As a tireless advocate for homeless students and their families, the Slatington resident recently drew praises of city and county officials for a career in which he will tell you was "based on doing the right thing."

Those values, Russell will admit, were instilled in him by his parents, the late Russell and Ann Valentini of Tamaqua, and in the halls of our school in Hometown. "It's what we were taught," Russell said, adding, "Marian was a big deal to go to. There was so much diversity in the little towns that made up the family, but you were a person, and it (the school) was a community."

"I always felt I was doing the right thing. The way I was raised, we were taught nobody is better than you and you were no better than anyone else. To be raised in a big family, what a jackpot!"

Russell and his five sisters, Sr. Lisa, Mary Beth, Jane, Sharon and Christine, are all MCHS graduates. Like so many other parents, their dad, also known as "Rooster," helped make Marian what it is today, working there and also doing volunteer work back in the 70s.

After attending Penn State where he studied law enforcement and corrections, Russell went on to work in the juvenile probation field. He was an outpatient drug and alcohol counselor in Pike County; worked in maximum security at a juvenile detention center in Weaversville; and then found his niche, working in an elementary

absenteeism program in the ASD, which eventually led to his longtime role as a "home and school visitor."

It was no ordinary line of work for Russell, who worked with more than 600 homeless students every year. It was work that helped to change lives – and probably saved lives – although, always humble, Russell said while the stories are sad, his work always centered on giving children a chance to make something of themselves. "There were times when I thought to myself, I'd do this for free," he said.



*Caption: 'Rooster' Valentini, holding baby kangaroo, has touched the lives of thousands.*

Throughout his career, Russell probably saw it all, explaining his work dealt with “people experiencing homelessness, some in survival mode.”

“It was not what we were used to,” he recalled. “We grew up with our folks encouraging us to make something of ourselves. I found many parents were trying to protect their children from the elements they considered normal. But for these people, for generations, they circled just the wagons.”

He tells the story of one parent who was indignant in telling him, “Who are you to try to put dreams into my kid’s heads? Stop encouraging them.” To that, Russell says, “I would never believe that to be possible.”

He also tells a story about a girl whose family just received a furnished house after years of being homeless and what the girl’s response was when she was asked how she liked her bed. “And she goes, ‘I don’t know. I’ve never slept in a bed,” Russell related.

He commented, “We can never overestimate what these children have never seen or been exposed to. It’s so important for us to give them a shot. We need to help them star in their own movie.”

Through his work, Russell visited the Salvation Army and other shelters, hotels where families were “being put up,” and even located children under bridges in the city.

“I focused on things like transportation, food sources, basic needs; hygiene, for example, which is a big deal for many of them.”

He added, “I learned quickly that people need bona fide stuff, things like new shoes, even bus tickets. These are generations of families who lived on public assistance.

They only knew the magic of checks showing up, so a lot of my work was giving them a learning process about planning.”

He explained his work involved “momentum gathering,” adding, “Giving them (homeless) a taste of things (success).” Often, a constant for parents was shut-off notices and evictions, prompting him to focus on “getting them a look at normalcy. “They need consistency.”

He will tell you about success stories of once-homeless children becoming a teacher or security guard, success stories he says were assisted because he “was blessed to have so many donations.”

“Bad stuff happens to good people,” Russell says. “Most people will rise up, but you gotta hold their hand. “It’s the old story, when someone gets out there in 30 feet of water, we throw ‘em 20 feet of rope and think they have what they need. To me, my philosophy is we got to get ‘em to land.”

Russell likened his day-to-day efforts to reach troubled families similar to another role of his in days gone by. He said, “When I was a volunteer with the Tamaqua ambulance, I learned how to deal with people. They didn’t come to us and say they needed to go to the hospital. We went to them. In my work, I always wanted to go to the families, to their ground.”

Having done that for three decades-plus, “Rooster,” the man known for being able to grow the best beard in the Lehigh Valley, with a toothpick always dangling from his lips, has a unique perspective on the labor of love. “I felt so blessed these people welcomed me into their lives, and, for them to welcome me back the next day, it felt so wonderful,” he said.



## **#OURMARIAN DAY OF CARING - MAY 13, 2020.**

This is a chance for our community to come together – in this unprecedented time – to support our Marian families. Marian is dedicated to providing our students with the best education possible; no matter the circumstances. All funds raised will benefit tuition assistance so we can help Marian students continue to pursue their academic goals and dreams. **In a show of support and loyalty to our alma mater, the Marian Catholic Alumni Association will match proceeds up to \$2,500.**

**Donate today at [www.mariancatholics.org/day-of-caring](http://www.mariancatholics.org/day-of-caring). Because together we can #ChangeTheirWorld!**

## **CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE:** 'You can go anywhere from here'

At the risk of people thinking our May newsletter is designed solely for the Class of 1973, I assembled it enthusiastically with a sense of pride in two of my classmates, Russell Valentini and Mark Purcell. In an era when this COVID-19 pandemic tends to put people in a "down" mode, their stories are uplifting and certainly give us a "boost" at a time when one is really needed.

The story of Russell's recent retirement from a position of aiding the homeless in the Lehigh Valley not only speaks to the challenge of the job, but it accentuates the kind of person he is. More importantly, it underscores the foundation of a man who grew up in a great family where values were stressed, allowing him to live his adulthood that way.

And Mark's message to the Class of 2020 (to see it, go to Marian Catholic Alumni Association's Facebook page) hit the proverbial nail on the head about Marian and the education it offers. If you haven't seen it, you have to. It's a "must see" video.

In it, Mark tells this year's senior class, "You can go anywhere from Marian." But, more importantly, in the words of my good friend and former Marian basketball coach Bob Fulton, who is mentioned in the video, his message is "a reflection of some of the values that are available and emphasized in a Marian education. It does make a difference because 'Jesus makes the difference.'"

In retrospect, you may recall a sign to that effect used to hang in the gymnasium here at Marian, clearly telling visitors what we believe. I have encouraged Principal Jean Susko to locate the sign and get it back hanging from the rafters. I know it pre-dates her principalship, and its whereabouts are still unknown, but now more than ever I think I'll encourage her to have another one made.

But back to Mark, in his video, he speaks to the Marian motto of "Ad Jesum Per Mariam," explaining it means "to Jesus through Mary."

He wishes 2020 graduates success in the future and continues, "You can go anywhere, you can do anything, after you graduate from Marian. So make your plans and live your dreams and make your plans big enough for God to fit in them and God will prove to you that you are much greater than you might ever think."

When I watched Mark's presentation, it hit home. Not only did I think he hit a home run with regard to Marian, but it also made me appreciate his dedication to Marian.

When we launched the alumni association reactivation last year and followed it up with our first newsletter earlier this year, Mark wrote to us, saying, "I wish I was closer to help with some of the endeavors and visioning with the alumni team. Congratulations on your first alumni newsletter. It's great to read the news from our Alma Mater."

Little did I know that even though he is a resident of Huntington Beach, CA, Mark is a valuable member of our team striving to promote Marian, and he's doing it from afar. He is a graduate who never forgot from where he came. We also remember Mark for his generosity in helping the Men of Marian raise the funds to install lights at the stadium in 2003.

Mark is a pastoral associate of divine worship and liturgical arts at SS. Simon and Jude Catholic Church there. The parish serves 4,000 families and he is responsible for all aspects of liturgical ministry, including the information and teaching of presiders, priests and deacons, lectors, greeters, extraordinary Eucharistic ministers, children and adult servers, music ministers and the worshipping assembly at large.

He graduated from the University of Scranton, St. Pius X Seminary, Chapman University, Orange, CA, and the University of Notre Dame.

So, I beg your indulgence in writing about these two members of the Class of 1973, but we thank them for being shining examples of our alumni.

### **MESSAGES FROM ALUMNI**

We welcome recorded messages from alumni all over the country/world. Similar to Mark Purcell's video, create your own. Send it to us and we will gladly share it on the school's and alumni's Facebook pages. We would love for you to tell us about yourself and encourage you to offer best wishes to the current Marian students and our family.



## REUNION NEWS

### Class of '80 plans reunion

Members of the Class of 1980 are planning to hold a 40-year reunion on Saturday, October 24, at Dean Anthony's banquet hall, 1122 North St., Jim Thorpe. The event will get underway with a "meet and greet" from 5-7 p.m., followed by the dinner and a social until 10 o'clock. Entertainment will be provided from 6-10 o'clock by DJ Ann Marie Calabrese. For more information, class members can contact Mary (McFadden) Sexton at Mary. Sexton@morganstanley.com.

### Events postponed

Members of the Class of 1968 had been planning to have a picnic later this year. The event has been postponed. The 70th birthday celebration of the Class of 1969 has also been postponed. The Class of 1970 announced plans for its reunion in the April newsletter. To date, no update on those plans has been received.

### Let us help with your reunion plans

Marian graduates who are planning and/or organizing their individual class' reunions are reminded the Advancement Office is here to help you. Contact director Kristine Evina, kevina@mariancatholics.org or alumni@mariancatholics.org. Among the many ways we can assist you is by offering those who attend your reunion tours of the school. A school representative can also attend your event and take photos to share on social media. We'd also treat classmates to a light reception at the school and, depending upon the availability of a priest, we could schedule a Mass for your class members.

## CONDOLENCES

*Please join us in offering prayers and condolences to the families of:*

**James Bumbulsky**, 87, formerly of McAdoo and Tamaqua, passed away on April 14, 2020. His obituary read: "He was a big part of the Marian High School community and was its No. 1 fan." Among his survivors are a son James, and his wife, Roseanne, and Linda, wife of Gary Fiorilla, both of Hometown, and Karen, wife of Joseph Garbacik.

**John F. Cannon**, 89, Allentown, passed away on April 18, 2020. A native of Coaldale and son of the late Frances Cannon and Nancy (Polansky) Cannon, he was a graduate of the former St. Mary's High School, Coaldale.

**Jimmy E. Dever**, 67, Tresckow, passed away on March 30, 2020. He was the father of Marian graduates Erin Dever Porambo and her husband, James, of Troy, N.Y., and Dana Dever, Mechanicville, N.Y.

**Arthur R. Fuehrer**, 82, Zion Grove, passed away on April 25, 2020. Among his survivors are a son, Arthur D., and his wife, the former Donna Ceci, Marian graduate and inductee in our sports Hall of Fame.

**Margaret D. McCarroll Henry**, 94, Summit Hill, passed away on April 6, 2020. She was the mother of 10 Marian graduates, Patrick McCarroll, and his wife Martha, Michael McCarroll, John McCarroll, and his wife Michele, David McCarroll, and his wife Helen, Joseph McCarroll, Maureen, wife of Francis McCullion, Jane Davies, and her fiancé Joe Dronetti, Christine, wife of Brian Tobin, and the late Eugene and Marianne.

**Eleanor McNealis**, 82, Jim Thorpe, passed away on April 16, 2020. Many of her family members, including children and grandchildren, are Marian graduates. Her survivors include Eleanor, wife of Richard Rowe, Francis Rossino, and wife Jennifer, Geralyn, wife of Terry Hartman, Daniel Rossino, and wife Julie, and Jeanette, wife of Ralph Richards.

**Lisa Nicole Napoletano**, 14, Penn Forest Township, Jim Thorpe, passed away on April 5, 2020, due to injuries she sustained in an accident on March 16. She was a daughter of Melissa (Asbrock) Napoletano and was a freshman here at Marian.

**Ann C. (Garrity) Winkler**, 63, Coaldale, passed away on April 10, 2020. A 1975 graduate of MCHS, she is survived by a sister Mary, wife of John Slaby.

## THREE-TIME ALL STATER

Congratulations are in order to Marian senior Tyler Fritz who was recently named to the Pennsylvania Sports Writers Class 2A All State Boys Basketball team for the third consecutive year.

Tyler is a son of Damian and Kristin Fritz and the grandson of former Marian coach, Bob Fulton, and his wife, Dianne.

Fritz averaged 28 ppg this past season, when he scored over 30 points in a game 13 times, including a season-high 41 points against Notre Dame of East Stroudsburg, leading the Colts to a 19-6 record and a Schuylkill League Division 3 championship.

Also this year, he rewrote the Marian boy's career points record, surpassing the record held for 23 years by '97 grad Joe Horvat (1,638.) Tyler finished his career with 1,959 points.

## FACEBOOK PAGES

We have a special request of all alumni groups who have their own Facebook pages. Please share our page – Marian Catholic Alumni Association – with your followers. Since there are a lot of different classes and groups out there who have their own pages, encouraging your followers to become followers of our page will help to strengthen our association and spread the good news about Marian.

## FOOTBALL

A new schedule and the return of Coach Stan Dakosty highlight the upcoming football schedule for the Marian Colts. The schedule is changed to reflect a co-op between the Schuylkill and Colonial leagues in which schools will play opponents of similar size. For the Colts, that means the addition of Catasauqua, Palmerton, Tri-Valley, Williams Valley and Pine Grove. No longer on the schedule are North Schuylkill, Tamaqua, Mahanoy Area, Jim Thorpe, Lehighton and Trinity.

As the Covid-19 pandemic battle continues, we are anticipating (and are hopeful of) an exciting season of Colts' football. You can follow the football program at Marian Colts Football on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and the Marian Quarterback Club on Facebook.

### 2020 SCHEDULE

August 22 - at Northern Lehigh (tbd) – scrimmage

August 28 – at Schuylkill Haven – 7 p.m.

September 4 – Minersville – 7 p.m.

September 11 – Catasauqua – 7 p.m.

September 18 – at Palmerton – 7 p.m.

September 25 – Shenandoah Valley – 7 p.m.

October 2 – Tri-Valley – 7 p.m.

October 9 – at Williams Valley – 7 p.m.

October 16 – at Nativity – 7 p.m.

October 23 – Panther Valley – 7 p.m.

October 30 – at Pine Grove – 7 p.m.

## WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Whether it's a job promotion, family addition, honors or special occasion – we invite you to share it with us.

We will gladly post it on our Facebook page for our followers, and would include any request in our upcoming newsletters. Email us at [alumni@mariancatholic.org](mailto:alumni@mariancatholic.org) or send it directly to the Advancement Office, [kevina@mariancatholic.org](mailto:kevina@mariancatholic.org), and we will be happy to share the great news about our Marian family members.

Keep up on all school news by visiting our school's website at [mariancatholic.org](http://mariancatholic.org).

*We look forward to hearing from you!*



[WWW.MARIANCATHOLICS.ORG](http://WWW.MARIANCATHOLICS.ORG)



Marian Catholic High School, 166 Marian Ave. Tamaqua, PA 18252  
570.467.3335 | [alumni@mariancatholic.org](mailto:alumni@mariancatholic.org)