

# Marian Catholic ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



**AUGUST 2021**



**SAVE THE DATE ★ SAT, OCT. 9**

## **HOMECOMING CELEBRATION PLANNED IN COLT COUNTRY**

Mark Saturday, October 9, on your calendars as an official "Save the Date" for the Marian Catholic 2021 Homecoming celebration where we welcome back all of our alumni, family and friends!

A day of activities has been tentatively scheduled in which alumni can bring their families back to the place they called home throughout their high school journeys. Most importantly, our Homecoming offers all of us the opportunity to see the great improvements made to our school and facilities; the chance to reunite with classmates and friends; and to conclude the reunion by cheering on our Marian Catholic Colt gridders.

We have made the accommodations for our Colts to play the Williams Valley Vikings on Saturday night at 7pm, so that everyone traveling from distant places can take full advantage of the day's events. Plus, everyone can see our Colts in action!

The Homecoming will begin with a Mass at 10am in the recently beautifully-renovated chapel in the school.

Alumni volleyball games will be part of the festivities, directed by our new coach, Maria Serina, '99. The matches will begin at 3pm. Alumni interested in participating can email Coach Serina at [coachserina@gmail.com](mailto:coachserina@gmail.com) for details.

Tours of the school will be held from 3:30-4:30pm in the afternoon, followed by an alumni happy hour from 5-6:30pm at Basile's Restaurant in Hometown. Every adult 21 and over will receive a drink ticket and hors d'oeuvres will be served. A cash bar will be held after the tickets are used.

At the school campus, we will have an alumni tent for everyone to gather between 6-7pm. Alumni will receive free water bottles and pom-poms, a chance to purchase Marian Catholic Bleacher Plaques, and VIP entrance to the football game.

For more information and/or questions about our 2021 Homecoming, contact our Director of Advancement, Kristine Evina, at [kevina@mariancatholic.org](mailto:kevina@mariancatholic.org).

## YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE: '87 GRAD SAYS MARIAN HELPED GET HIM TO MIT

*Editor's Note: In this month's issue, we highlight the leading role being played by '87 graduate Joe Higgins, formerly of Nesquehoning, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The series, "You can get there from here," is designed to share the good news of alumni in various life endeavors upon attaining a Marian Catholic education.*



To Joe Higgins, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is a "delightfully complex research place that has some of the smartest people in the world." It's the place where he hangs his hat these days while working on billions of dollars' worth of projects. That's "billions" with a "B."

Higgins, a 1987 graduate of Marian Catholic High

School and former Nesquehoning resident, is one of the many vice presidents at MIT, directing Campus Services and Stewardship as one of the core members of its management team that oversees business and administrative functions.

With 800 employees under him, Higgins oversees the Office of Sustainability, Environment Health and Safety, the Office of Campus Planning, and MIT Facilities, including Campus Construction. Ever humble, he describes his job of unquestionably huge responsibilities as "handling crisis after crisis, but empowering people to do the best they can."

He added, "MIT is a research place, with like 20,000 independent businesses doing all they can to maximize their own world."

Since 2016, Higgins has managed critical aspects of MIT's facilities, including finance and administration, procurement, communications and customer engagement. In 2018, he assumed responsibility for management of maintenance, utilities and facilities engineering. He and his team are responsible for safely and sustainably planning, designing, constructing, maintaining and powering the MIT campus, with buildings totaling over 12 million gross square feet.

During his career, he worked for a consulting management firm that served many prominent institutions of higher learning, including Harvard, Yale, Rockefeller, George Washington, Northwestern and Tufts universities, where he provided strategic and engineering services to more than 100 academic and non-profit institutions for their buildings and broader campus initiatives.

Working with the Director of Sustainability, he led MIT's alliance with Boston Medical Center and Post Office Square to create a 60-megawatt, 650-acre solar power installation, adding carbon-free energy to the grid. MIT's purchase of power from this North Carolina facility's 255,000 solar panels was equivalent to 40 percent of the institute's electricity use at the time, neutralizing 17 percent of MIT's carbon emissions.

"We work together to shape and enable our campus and community to tackle big, important problems for the world," he said, noting his job includes day-to-day collaboration with finance, treasury, human resources, information technology and MIT Medical.

Higgins is accountable for all of the fiscal, technical, compliance and sustainability attributes of campus design, construction and operations across 168 acres, 13 million square feet, 160 buildings, 5,500 lab spaces, 40MW of electric utility generation, 17 miles of utilities, 400 active construction projects – all supported by 800 staff with operating budget of \$150M per year and capital budget \$400M per year.

He is the steward and architect for the implementation of MIT's \$5.2-billion Capital Plan enabling break-through knowledge in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship. Under his watch, MIT has completed \$1B in projects, has another \$1B of projects in construction underway, and has another \$1B currently in design.

Prior to joining MIT, Higgins served as vice president and head of engineering for Fidelity Investments, where he was responsible for the infrastructure systems across a global real estate portfolio including key data centers, trading floors, call centers, and corporate office campuses. He also served as Fidelity's first corporate sustainability officer, providing leadership, coordination, and reporting for a broad array of sustainability initiatives across worldwide locations.

Earlier in his career, he served for 14 years as director of engineering and then as executive director of strategic and technical services at a Connecticut-based facility management company. In these roles, he provided strategic and engineering services to over 100 academic and nonprofit institutions on their building projects and broader campus initiatives.

### **Started at Marian Catholic**

Joe's journey to a top rung on the ladder of one of the most prestigious college campuses in the country started at Marian Catholic, where he played football for Coach Dakosty's Colts.

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**YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE (CONTINUED)**

He started on the offensive and defensive lines when the Colts won the 1986 Eastern Conference Class B championship and established a record 24 straight victories. "Coach and his assistants taught us not only how to play the game, but about life's challenges," he said. "They taught us that you don't fall down, you get up and keep going. That thought has stayed with me through adulthood," Joe said.

Higgins went to Swarthmore College on a football-related Thomas Kershaw Engineering Scholarship and played on its gridiron for four years, captaining the 1990 team. During his career, he was named to the First Team Defense of the All Centennial Conference and was named the 1991 National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame Scholar Athlete for the Philadelphia Chapter.

In the classroom, he was outstanding, having been selected to represent the entire college in the U.S. News and World Report article in which Swarthmore was voted the No. 1 liberal arts college in the country.

Higgins graduated there in 1991 with two degrees – a B.S. degree in engineering and a B.A. degree in economics. He then went on to earn a Master of Science degree in Education from the University of Oxford U.K. Christ Church College, where he was a co-captain of the university's American football team playing university competitions across the U.S.

A son of Joe and Valerie Higgins of Hometown, formerly of Nesquehoning, he has three other siblings who graduated from Marian Catholic, including Pam, who works as a technical lab director in Pennsylvania; Matt, a technical/sales position at KME in Nesquehoning; and Samantha, who works in film and movie production in Philadelphia.

Joe and his wife Christine will note their 25th wedding anniversary in October. They are both competitive rowers on the Charles River, where he admits, "she is admirably better than I." Joe enjoys short track speedskating with the Bay State Speedskating Club and says when he comes back to the area, he returns to the Marian Catholic track, field and stadium bleachers "for exercise."

They have a son Jack, who graduated from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and was a two-time All American NCAA swimmer, and a daughter Emilia, a second-year midshipman at the academy and a swimmer as well.

**One of three Coal Crackers**

Ironically, Higgins is joined at MIT by two other Pennsylvania Coal Region natives, Dr. Maria Zuber, a Summit Hill native and Panther Valley High School graduate, and Martin A. Schmidt, originally from Mountaintop.

Dr. Zuber is MIT's Vice President for Research who was recently

named by President Joe Biden to the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. Her research focuses on the structure and tectonics of solid solar system objects. She specializes in using gravity and laser altimetry measurements to determine interior structure and evolution and has been involved in more than half a dozen NASA planetary missions aimed at mapping the Moon, Mars, Mercury, as well as several asteroids.

Schmidt is the MIT provost in charge of faculty members.

About Zuber, Higgins, who joins her on the MIT Climate Action Plan, said, "She's a fantastic, amazing person who is mapping out the moons."

He added, "To have three people from the Coal Regions in responsible positions here is great. I don't know if there's something in the soil back home, or what, but it's a wonderful testament to the people of Pennsylvania. It tells you the type of people we are."

**Marian Catholic advantage**

Higgins remembers his days at Marian Catholic well. He said, "Nobody (students) was thinking about a career; we were having so much fun with sports and making friends, but I really enjoyed the classes, and then some of our teachers would prompt us to start thinking about our careers."

"I really enjoyed school," he added. "I was like a sponge, soaking everything in. The teachers would talk to you about future careers. I loved math, and teachers like Mr. (John) Huber and Mr. (Len) Brylewski would point out, 'you're really good at this; you ought to think about an engineering career.'

"At that point, I had never met an engineer, so I never even thought about becoming one, but our teachers recognized my strengths. Coach (Lou) Ceci taught physics, and made it so enjoyable. Mr. (Charles) Connely would urge us to pick a path and start pursuing it, saying 'things will open up for you.'"

He added, "At Marian Catholic, our teachers took a personal interest in us. They had a vested interest in our success."

Higgins said his experience playing football under Dakosty and his staff, and the advocacy from Marian teachers recommendations "were a contributing factor to being considered, recruited and admitted to Swarthmore.

"I was not a top recruit, but when I told Coach Dakosty I might want to play football in college, he encouraged me to 'Try.' He, of course, knows an enormous amount of college coaches. We put together game tapes and several smaller schools were interested in me. He really helped me navigate that. I wasn't one of the best players, but Coach gives his attention to all of his players and that was so valuable to me."

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**YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE (CONTINUED)**

Teachers and coaches taking an interest in their students, he said, "is a huge advantage for Marian students, adding, "I remember they were personally vested in our success. We probably didn't realize that then, but I was pleasantly surprised when I went to Swarthmore. Marian prepared me to have a

running start on adjusting to college. In fact, Marian got me there, and kept me there.

"All the people who invested their time and energy gave me gifts and talents that I have to make good on," Higgins said.

**CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE BY BILL O'GUREK, CLASS OF '73**

There we were – myself, Siobhan and our grandson, Jack – enjoying a leisurely walk on a spring day along the Radnor Trail, between Villanova and Wayne in Montgomery County, about 100 miles south of here, when a friendly chap, dressed in Villanova University shorts and a matching "national champs" t-shirt, indicative of the Wildcats' 2018 NCAA basketball championship, stopped us on our trek, noticing the Marian Football shirt I was wearing.

"That's that great school up north," he said in a matter-of-fact manner, kind of questioning if what I was wearing referenced our Alma Mater. "Yes, it is," I proudly replied.

In our brief encounter, he proceeded to tell me he recently retired from Villanova, where his work included making trips to "college fair" events at high schools in the northeastern U.S., where he and his Villanova associates would speak to prospective students about their collegiate choices.

"Great school...great students," he offered about his impressions of our school, adding "and great sports programs too."

As our conversation continued, the VU retiree pointed out his brother-in-law played basketball at East Stroudsburg back in the 70s, when one of his teammates was Bobby Schlosser, '72, Marian Hall of Fame inductee and a member of Coach Bob Fulton's state championship team of '71. As he apparently knew pretty much about our beloved Alma Mater, it prompted me to believe it sure is a "small world."

The commentary, and information, were nice to hear, and made me proud of the fact that our reputation here at Marian precedes us.

It also got me thinking about the time we visited the Kutztown Folk Festival a few years back. I was wearing similar Marian attire at the time when a gentleman started a conversation with me at my favorite vendor stand where they offer what I believe to be the best kielbasa ever. "We played 'em," he

started, pointing to my Marian attire and then reminding me of a three-year stint in the 1990s when our Colts played Exeter, the Reading-based high school, on the gridiron. "They (the Colt football players) were tough as nails," he added.

In that brief encounter, he couldn't say enough about what he felt was a domineering style of play Coach Stan Dakosty's teams showed their neighbors from Berks County back then. For the record, our Colts were 3-0 against the Eagles, outscoring them 74-13 in games played in '93, '94 and '95.

"Thanks," I simply said, probably understating, "We're proud of what our kids accomplish."

That moment, and the recent one in Montgomery County, happened by chance on those days, but they did serve to remind me that the work done in Colt Country – not just on the fields and courts, but, more importantly, in the classrooms – doesn't go unnoticed. And that's a great thing!

Moments like those two, I believe, reinforce our belief in the product that is Marian Catholic High School, because so often in this world, what's important is not so much what we think of ourselves, but what others think of us. And to have persons completely unknown to us take the time to offer positive commentary on the reputation that is Marian, should speak volumes to all of us.

Here at Marian, we're very proud of our past, and, more importantly, we are confident in our future. As alumni, we cherish the education provided us and want to do our part to help make sure this generation and the next have the same opportunities that were afforded us.

We encourage all alumni to become active members in our association (go to [www.mariancatholic.org/alumni](http://www.mariancatholic.org/alumni); click on alumni), to play a role, no matter big or small, in helping to maintain our identity and our future.

## '00 VALEDICTORIAN HEADS TEMPLE U. HOSPITAL DEPARTMENT



David T. O'Gurek, MD, FAFP, was recently named Interim Chair of the Department of Family & Community Medicine at the Lewis Katz School of Medicine (LKSOM) at Temple University and Interim Chief of Service for Family Medicine at the Temple University Health System.

In this role, he will oversee the department's clinical and community efforts,

serving the community of North Philadelphia; educational efforts, teaching in the medical school and clinical environment as well as initiating its family medicine residency program; and research efforts in advancing community and population health.

A Summit Hill native, Dr. O'Gurek is a 2000 graduate of Marian and completed his undergraduate studies at St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia. He earned his medical degree from the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, Hershey, and completed a family medicine residency at Lancaster General Health in Pennsylvania. He practices comprehensive outpatient family medicine, as well as serves as medical director of the TRUST Clinic, an office-based opioid treatment (OBOT) program

for patients who experience opioid use disorder (OUD).

He also serves as founding director of Begin the Turn, a community-based, multidisciplinary mobile care unit serving patients with OUD and homelessness in North Philadelphia. Notably, he has partnered with the City of Philadelphia and its agencies to address the overdose crisis, currently serving on the Mayor's Commission on Addiction and Recovery.

Dr. O'Gurek has lectured locally, regionally, and nationally on the topic. He is a former chair of the American Academy of Family Physician's Commission on Health of the Public and Science and former board chair and president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Family Physicians (PAFP). He currently serves as board chair of the Pisacano Leadership Foundation, the leadership foundation of the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM).

A son of David and Patrice (Kocha) O'Gurek, he has been recognized by Philadelphia Magazine in 2020 and 2021 as a Top Doc, received multiple Golden Apple teaching awards from LKSOM, and was named the Exemplary Teacher of the Year by the PAFP in 2016.

His sister, Dr. Amy O'Gurek, valedictorian of our Class of '99, is on the staff at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Lebanon.

## ONE OF THE TOP NY ADVISORS IS '79 GRAD, BOARD MEMBER

Bridgewater Advisors, New York City, whose founding partner is Leo Marzen, MCHS Class of '79 and a current member of our school's advisory board, was recently named one of the top financial advisors in the country, and one of five in the State of New York, in the Wall Street Journal.

The listing is based on ratings of Barron's, the magazine/newspaper published by Dow Jones & Company and a sister publication to the WSJ. Bridgewater Advisors is a private, independent firm dedicated to helping clients achieve their personal goals by providing exceptional wealth advisory services that include investment management, financial planning and tax efficiency.

Leo has been working in the financial services industry for more than 30 years, joining Bridgewater Advisors as a Partner in 1993. He comes to investment management through the financial controls and auditing work he performed for securities firms early in his career at Coopers & Lybrand. He was also a manager at a CPA firm serving wealthy individuals prior to starting his own advisory firm.



## SERINA NAMED MARIAN CATHOLIC VOLLEYBALL COACH



Maria (Poluka) Serina, Class of '99, has been named our new volleyball coach at Marian Catholic, succeeding John Falalbel.

Serina coached eight seasons at Nativity B.V.M. High School (2004-2011), where she guided the team to five straight district titles. Most recently, she coached both

junior high girls and boys at Parkland while also working as a volunteer assistant volleyball coach here at Marian.

In the off-season, she has coached club volleyball at Anthracite Volleyball Academy since 2000. In addition to actively coaching, Maria has been the club director, recruiting coordinator, and community outreach/special events coordinator.

At AVA, she has taken teams to compete as far south as Florida and as far North as Boston. She has USA Volleyball CAP I training and has IMPACT certification while she has also served as an assessor and evaluator and evaluator at USA Volleyball's High Performance camp.

Maria was a four-year varsity performer here in Hometown. She was a captain in both her junior and senior seasons; was named a two-time First Team All-League and First Team All-District selection; and was named the Schuylkill League Most Outstanding Player in her senior year. She was also named the Times News Volleyball Player of the Year after both her junior and senior seasons.

After high school, she played at Muhlenberg College, Allentown, where she was a team captain. She finished her college career as Muhlenberg's leader in career digs, season digs and match digs, and was selected to the conference's All-Academic team in both her junior and senior seasons.

Serina obtained her BA in English and her Secondary Teaching Certificate from Muhlenberg College. Additionally, she obtained a Masters of Education and Principal's Certificate from Wilkes University. She has been employed as an English teacher by the Parkland School District since 2003. She currently resides in Andreas with her husband, AJ, 'XX, who is an Assistant District Attorney, and their children Andrew (13), Alexa (10), and Aiden (8).

## DAMIAN FRITZ NAMED TO SUCCEED COACH BRUTTO

Marian Catholic High School has announced Damian Fritz will be its new head girls basketball coach, succeeding legendary head coach Paul Brutto, who announced his retirement in early July.

Coach Fritz brings over 20 years of coaching experience, including stints as the head coach of the Leighton and Jim Thorpe's boys programs. In the 2003-04 season, he guided the Indians to a 5-19 record. He then led the Olympians in 2004-05 (17-8) and 2005-06 (12-13), compiling a mark of 29-21 at Thorpe.

For the past seven seasons, he has been a member of the Marian boys' basketball program, serving as an assistant coach under John Patton.

In addition to his coaching experience, Fritz and his family have been a fixture at Marian over the past seven years. He and his wife, Kristin, have four children including sons, Tyler, a 2020 graduate of Marian and the school's all-time leading basketball scorer with 1,959 points, and Logan, a rising senior on the Colts basketball team, along with two daughters Ava, an incoming freshman, and Addison, who is in eighth grade.

Coach Fritz graduated from Tamaqua Area High School, where he scored 802 career points from 1990-93.



## IN OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

**Marian alumni and friends are asked to keep in their thoughts and prayers the families of the following:**

**John Florian Bohovich Jr.**, 66, of Summit Hill, passed away on Oct. 26, 2020. He was a 1972 graduate of Marian Catholic High School.

**Mrs. Caroline A. (Watkins) Coll**, 71, of Nesquehoning, passed away on June 14, 2021. She was a 1967 graduate of Marian Catholic High School.

**Dominic D. DeMarco**, 66, of Lansford, passed away on July 14, 2021. He was a 1972 graduate of Marian High School.

**Donna M. (Lisella) Jones**, 67, of Summit Hill, passed away on June 16, 2021. She was a 1972 graduate of Marian Catholic High School.

**Michael J. McCall**, 56, of Summit Hill, passed away on July 29, 2021. He was a 1983 graduate of Marian Catholic High School.

**Leo Gregory Popnick**, 90, of Barnesville, passed away on July 4, 2021. He was a 1951 graduate of St. Jerome's High School.

**Eugenia G. Praskac**, 88, formerly of Tamaqua, passed away on June 16, 2021. She was a 1950 graduate of St. Jerome's High School and the mother of John, '70, and his wife Diane, and Patricia, '73, and her husband, Joseph Balascik, '72.

**Joseph W. Snyder Sr.**, 53, of Hamburg, passed away on July 21, 2021. He was a 1986 graduate of Marian Catholic High School.

**The Rev. Michael J. Stone**, 78, of Blakeslee, passed away on June 14, 2021. He was a 1960 graduate of Marian Catholic High School.

**George M. Watsula**, 66, of Tuscarora, passed away on July 17, 2021. He was a 1973 graduate of Marian Catholic High School.

**Jean A. (Yurkunas) Williams**, 74, of Summit Hill, passed away June 27, 2021. She was a 1964 graduate of Marian Catholic High School.

### MARIAN COLTS' VARSITY FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

August 27 – Schuylkill Haven  
 September 3 – at Minersville  
 September 10 – at Catasauqua  
 September 17 – Palmerton  
 September 24 – at Shenandoah  
 October 1 – at Tri-Valley  
 October 9 – Williams Valley  
 October 15 – Nativity  
 October 22 – at Panther Valley  
 October 29 – Pine Grove

### VOLLEYBALL

September 4 – at Bethlehem Freedom  
 September 7 – Weatherly Area  
 September 8 – Notre Dame (Green Pond)

September 9 – at Nativity  
 September 11 – at Easton Area Tourney  
 September 14 – at Mahanoy Area  
 September 16 – Shenandoah Valley  
 September 21 – Minersville  
 September 23 – at Tri-Valley  
 September 25 – at Northampton Tourney  
 September 27 – Williams Valley  
 September 28 – at Halifax Area  
 September 30 – at Weatherly Area  
 October 5- Nativity  
 October 7 – Mahanoy Area  
 October 9 – Berks Catholic  
 October 11 – at Brandywine Heights  
 October 12 – at Shenandoah Valley  
 October 14 – Millersburg Area

### **We know our alumni are proud about the education they received at Marian Catholic!**

Join our Alumni Association today for a nominal membership fee of \$10 per year. In an era when Catholic schools are facing continuous challenges that have prompted many to close their doors, our alumni strive to be there for the next generation and for years to come. If each of us can do just a little, together we can do great things for our Alma Mater!

Go [www.mariancatholics.org](http://www.mariancatholics.org) and click on "Alumni" and "Join" to become a member today!



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

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