

IMPACT

ISSUE 1

SPRING 2025



CATHERINE PHAM
Marketing and Finance
Class of 2025

FEATURE STORIES:

RISE ABOVE

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PRIESTS

LOWERING THE BARRIERS TO LEGAL EDUCATION

THE LEGACY OF COACH COCCO

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WELCOME

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

In recent months, I have found myself reflecting on the meaning of faith in action.

How are we called to manifest the love of Christ in the world? How can we animate our beliefs to serve the human family and God's creation? For some, faith in action means volunteering at a soup kitchen. For others, it means offering an extra carpool shift when a neighbor needs a helping hand. And for the Seton Hall community, it means ensuring the next generation of learners is equipped with the tools they need to build a better world.

Our donors have put their faith into action through their generous support of our University.

Throughout the pages of *IMPACT*, you will see stories of lives transformed by this generosity.

I hope you find yourself as inspired and emboldened by these stories as I am.

Seton Hall is a unique place where students are molded not only into successful professionals, but into Great Minds who live their Greater Purpose boldly in the world.

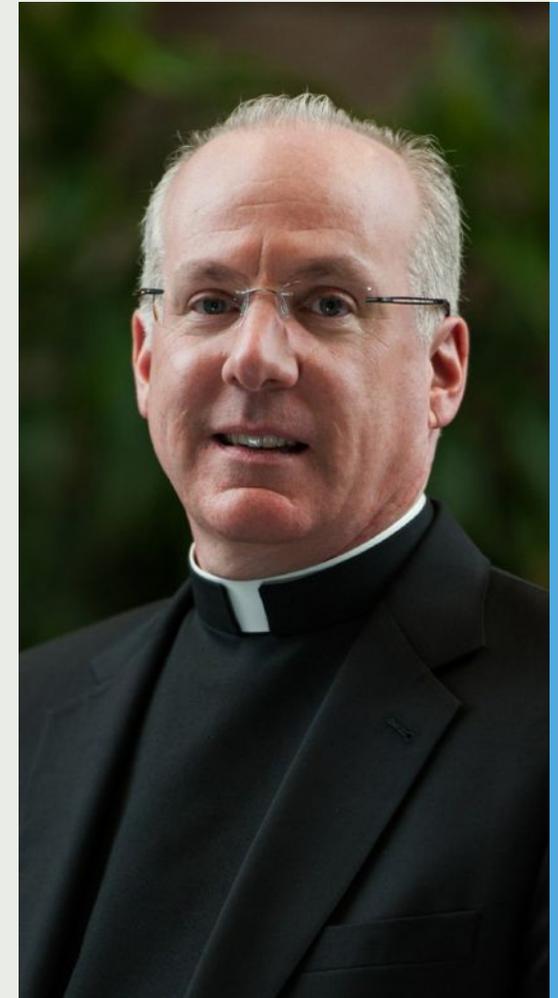
By supporting our Catholic mission and the work at Seton Hall, our benefactors are affirming and strengthening the conviction that faith in action creates beautiful and lasting change.

May God bless you abundantly for all you do for Seton Hall.

Yours truly in the Lord Jesus,



Monsignor Joseph R. Reilly '87, S.T.L., Ph.D.
President



IMPACT



From all of us at Seton Hall University, welcome to the debut issue of *IMPACT*. This is the first in a series of six biannual publications where we will present stories about outstanding students, alumni and faculty who have felt the impact of the generosity of our supporters.

Philanthropy at Seton Hall takes many forms. By giving the gift of scholarship support, you give our students access to enlightenment, inspiration and the tools to contribute meaningfully to society.

The largesse of our alumni and friends has also made it possible for us to enrich our educational programming with experiential learning opportunities. It has supported capital upgrades, and academic centers and institutes that magnify the important research and instruction throughout our three campuses.

This generosity also helps strengthen our cornerstones by enhancing academic programming, supporting our stellar faculty through endowed positions and discretionary funds and enabling cutting-edge research that improves communities around the world.

Most importantly, the generous support of our alumni and friends helps us further advance Seton Hall and her mission.

Thank you for your generosity to Seton Hall University. I invite you to enjoy the stories of *IMPACT*.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Paparsenos'.

Jon Paparsenos '99
Vice President for University Advancement

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

\$19.4

MILLION

NEW GIFT COMMITMENTS
IN FISCAL YEAR 2024

8,677

TOTAL DONORS

IN FISCAL YEAR 2024

\$369.8

MILLION

ENDOWMENT VALUE AT
END OF 2024

26,241

ENGAGED ALUMNI

IN FISCAL YEAR 2024

ENGAGE

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THERE ARE MANY WAYS FOR ALUMNI
AND FRIENDS TO ENGAGE WITH SETON
HALL UNIVERSITY, INCLUDING:

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- Volunteering on boards or at events
- Attending events and programs
- Mentoring students
- Serving as an ambassador
- Reading our e-newsletters

EXPLORE, CONNECT, ENGAGE, BY VISITING
[SHU.EDU/ALUMNI](https://shu.edu/alumni)

RISE ABOVE

HOW SETON HALL'S RESILIENCE, INTEGRITY, SCHOLARSHIP AND EXCELLENCE PROGRAM TURNED CATHERINE PHAM INTO A LEADER.

Catherine Pham's journey to Seton Hall began in the fall of 2020. Covid was raging. Pham's high school in Brooklyn, New York, where she grew up and had lived with her father until recently, had switched to virtual instruction, and Pham had decided on a change of scenery for her senior year. She went to stay with her mother in Newark, New Jersey, and helped out at her mother's cafe, which remained open for first responders. "My laptop would be running as I was blending smoothies," Pham recalls of juggling work and studies.

Pham was chatting about college with a customer who wondered if she'd given any

thought to Seton Hall. After receiving a letter in the mail, she looked up the university and learned about a program called RISE — short for Resilience, Integrity, Scholarship and Excellence.

RISE provides financial, academic and social support to low-income and first-generation college students, as well as students who use disability services.

Pham applied. "I told my brothers, if all goes well and they accept me into this RISE program, I'll go to Seton Hall."



RISE SCHOLARS GET CREATIVE



Months later, Pham found herself with a stack of acceptance letters befitting her strong academic record. Seton Hall offered the best academic scholarship plus an additional amount through RISE, a sum that covered the cost of textbooks while mitigating the rising price of annual tuition in excess of her primary scholarship. But it wasn't just the funding that clinched Pham's decision.

"During my interview," she tells *IMPACT*, "the assistant director for the program was talking about how RISE goes beyond a community — it's more like a family. That stuck in my head. I didn't know if I could find people who care this way at a bigger university."

Pham is one of more than 170 students to date who have benefitted from RISE, now in its fifth year. The program is modeled on the federal TRiO Student Support Services grant, and is supported by several sources, including individual donors

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“EVERY SUCCESS I’VE HAD OUTSIDE THE RISE PROGRAM, I’VE BEEN ABLE TO TRACE BACK TO IT.”

—Catherine Pham, Class of 2025



like Tom Tran '78, who made a \$500,000 gift to initially endow the scholarships in 2023. Decades ago, Seton Hall had taken a chance on Tran — now a seasoned healthcare executive — when he arrived in New Jersey as an 18-year-old Vietnamese refugee in 1975. He wanted to repay his alma mater by providing funds to help students like Pham, herself the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants. As Tran previously told Seton Hall magazine, “Without Seton Hall I wouldn’t have gotten to where I am now.”

Born in 2003, Pham grew up in Brooklyn’s Sunset Park neighborhood and attended New York City Public Schools. She practiced martial arts in elementary and middle school and then played volleyball in high school, where she excelled in subjects like AP chemistry and AP biology. She fell in love with reading and writing through an American literature class. She was a member of the sewing club, comic book club and peer mediation. And she was one of three students in her grade who registered for an engineering class, in which she built a structurally sound chair using only cardboard.

“From elementary through high school, there

was nothing hard about school,” says Pham. “I was able to pick up things super easily.”

As college drew near, however, Pham felt unprepared. In the passenger seat of her brother’s 2012 Honda Accord as he drove her to orientation on the morning of August 25, 2021, Pham’s stomach filled with butterflies. She’d become acquainted with her RISE cohort during a three-week virtual program earlier in the summer, but she had no idea what they’d think of her in person, or she of them. At the same time, she was filled with excitement and hope about the opportunities RISE could provide. Those words from her conversation with the assistant director replayed in her mind: *It’s more like a family.*

Pham arrived on campus and found her way to the RISE headquarters. As she walked in, her nerves subsided at the sight of a giant whiteboard that said, “Welcome to RISE.” Her RISE class included roughly 50 students, and she immediately connected with the group. They bonded over shared experiences like coming from immigrant families and growing up in lower income neighborhoods. They hung

out all day and then grabbed a bite at Miti Miti, a Latin joint in downtown South Orange. As Pham recalls, “That’s when I felt like, OK, this is home.”

Pham, who opted to live with her mother to save money, speaks highly of RISE workshops she took in areas like financial literacy and résumé-building. But the program’s most meaningful benefits were the more personal ones.

“My advisor would always have check-ins with me,” says Pham, who likewise hit it off with the first-year mentor RISE paired her with, a “ball of sunshine” senior named Jasmyne Emerson. “I was terrified of college,” says Pham. “She made everything less scary.” Emerson even inspired Pham to become a RISE mentor herself. “It didn’t really click to me what the mentor job was until the moment I had one of my students come to me and cry about something, and I was like, I’m really here for you.”

Pham eventually became a mentor coordinator, a job that entails everything from organizing schedules and liaising with Seton Hall’s professional staff, to disseminating information through email and social media channels. (Pham revamped @setonhall_rise on Instagram.) Her



work as a RISE tutor for business students — she’s a finance/marketing double major with a minor in economics — has been equally rewarding. “As I’m tutoring,” she says, “it solidifies all this information in my brain, because I learn best when I teach other people. So I was able to push forward in all my other classes.”

With her four years at Seton Hall and RISE coming to an end, Pham is looking confidently to the future. She aspires to work in marketing, either in beauty or sports. Her ultimate goal? CMO or CEO. In the meantime, she already has a job lined up: the country club where Pham works as a server offered her a full-time marketing position upon graduation.

If RISE didn’t exist, Pham’s time at Seton Hall would have been a lot different. “I would have

just gone to my classes and gone straight home,” she says. “I wouldn’t be on campus at all. College would just be something to get done rather than something to look forward to.”

In other words, RISE completely transformed Pham’s Seton Hall experience. What would she say to the donors who made that possible? “It’s such a big help in even the smallest ways. These funds keep the program running, and they give students the opportunity to have resources that go way beyond money.”



LEARN MORE ABOUT CATHERINE AND HER EXPERIENCE WITH RISE.
[HTTPS://SETONHALL.EDU/RISE-ABOVE](https://setonhall.edu/rise-above)

LEARNING TO LEAD

A GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP PREPARED MEGHAN MURPHY FOR A FUTURE IN THE FIELD.

Meghan Murphy '22/M.P.A. '23 has Seton Hall in her blood. Her mother and aunt graduated from the university in 1986.

Another aunt earned her J.D. from Seton Hall Law School in 1987. Her grandfather worked for the university's security department in the 1990s, and her great grandfather studied theology at Seton Hall in the 1950s.

Murphy continued her family legacy when she enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences at the end of a gap year following her high school graduation from Mount Saint Dominic Academy in nearby Caldwell, New Jersey. It was the fall of 2018, and Murphy, who decided to commute from her home in East Hanover, New Jersey, to save money, wasn't sure what she wanted to study. Then she took a sociology

course with Professor C. Lynn Carr.

"Learning why things go wrong in society was just so interesting," Murphy says. "I learned a lot of information I hadn't been previously exposed to, and I could really see myself taking that information into a 'helping' field like nonprofit work."

Murphy declared a sociology major, and as soon as she became eligible junior year, enrolled in the College of Arts and Science's master of public administration program, in which students complete a fifth year to earn their graduate degree. Having funded her undergraduate coursework through scholarships, she applied for scholarships to make graduate school possible as well.

Murphy received the Thomas J. Stanton, Jr., Endowed Scholarship which is awarded to deserving students who have a commitment to public service in New Jersey.

Murphy additionally covered some of her credits through a graduate assistantship in Seton Hall's Donor Relations department. "I learned soft skills, like speaking with high-level donors, coordinating volunteers and coworker dynamics. I really got a good idea of how nonprofits work, especially from the fundraising side." She gained further experience through Seton Hall's Center for Community Research and Engagement, where she got her experience with grant writing.



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“THEY GAVE ME THE GIFT OF HAVING NO DEBT, AND I’D LOVE TO BE ABLE TO HELP SOMEONE LIKE THEY DID, DOWN THE LINE.”

—Meghan Murphy ’22/M.P.A. ’23

Today, Murphy works for the Mental Health Association as a prevention consultant, traveling to high schools in New Jersey’s Sussex and Morris counties and educating students on mental health issues such as bullying and social media.

“Seton Hall really prepared me with professional skills,” she says, “and hopefully this is a stepping stone. I got my degree, in theory, to become a director or a vice president. I’d love to start my own nonprofit if I can, or run one. That’s the dream.”

THE MAKING OF A NICU NURSE

EMILY GUERRERO'S NURSING SCHOLARSHIP PAVED THE WAY FOR A CAREER IN CARE.



“AS NURSES, WE ARE SERVANT LEADERS. SO MUCH OF WHAT I DO NOW IS CLOSELY CONNECTED TO WHAT I LEARNED AT SETON HALL.”

—Emily Guerrero '24, R.N.

Of all the infants Emily Guerrero '24 has looked after in her job as a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Nurse at HMH Jersey Shore University Medical Center, there's one who returns to her thoughts time and again. The baby girl was born with a life-altering condition that devastated her parents. At the end of Guerrero's first day caring for this newborn, she couldn't stop second-guessing whether she'd supported the family to the best of her ability. That doubt nagged at Guerrero until the baby's discharge two months later, when the mother handed Guerrero a heart-warming letter.

“She said she will never be able to repay me for the support I gave her and her baby and that I helped keep her strong for her baby,” recalls Guerrero. “That's a moment I think about a lot. It's the reason we do the work that we do — to support an entire family.”

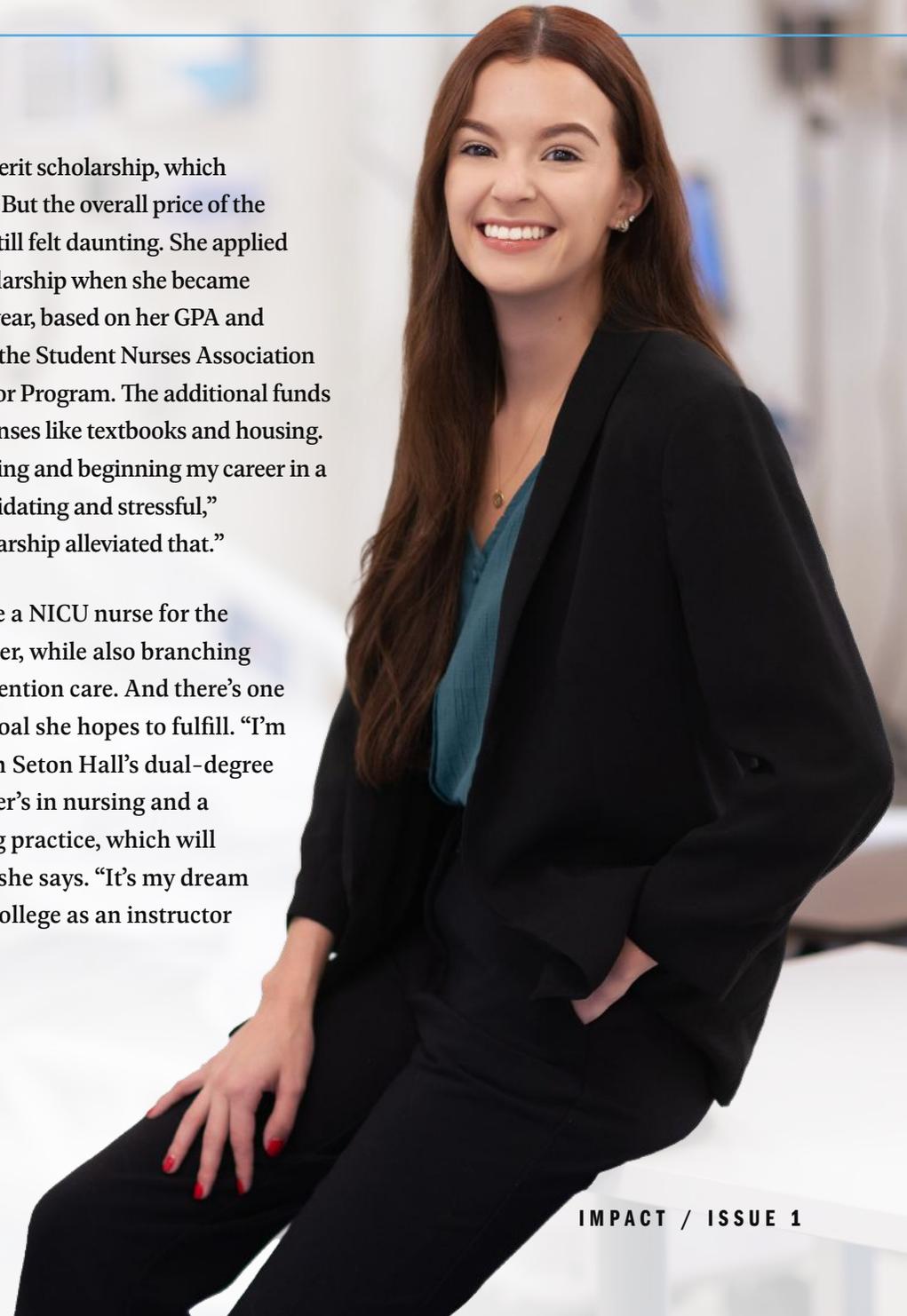
Support is something that was instilled in Guerrero during her first clinical rotation at Seton Hall's College of Nursing, which consistently climbs the charts in *U.S. News & World Report's* university rankings. (It became New Jersey's first baccalaureate nursing program upon its founding in 1937.) Under the supervision of Dr. Erin Leonard, Clinical Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, Guerrero and her classmates tended to an elderly woman who'd been hospitalized for days and needed hygiene assistance. “We spent an hour with her, brushing her teeth and her hair, talking to her and her husband, and at the end of it, her smile was so bright,” says Guerrero. “She just wanted to be talked to and have her basic needs taken care of.”

Guerrero's education was supported by a Gleason Family Foundation College of Nursing scholarship. Established in 2013 by Martin '68/M.B.A. '75 and his wife, Lenore Gleason, the scholarship has provided more than \$100,000 to 26 Seton Hall nursing students to date. Guerrero's story demonstrates its potential for cultivating passionate first-class practitioners. "There is no better way to make a lasting impact on patient care," says Martin Gleason, "than by helping to staff hospitals with a new generation of highly-trained nurses."

Guerrero's nursing career was inspired by her own experience in hospitals and doctors' offices, as a teenager with health issues. "The nurses who took care of me left a lasting impact," she says. After pivoting from plans to become a professional dancer, Guerrero applied to a number of nursing programs within driving distance of her home in Connecticut. She was drawn to Seton Hall's mission of servant leadership. "As nurses, we are servant leaders," she says. "So much of what I do now is closely connected to what I learned at Seton Hall."

Guerrero earned a merit scholarship, which helped cover tuition. But the overall price of the four-year program still felt daunting. She applied for the Gleason scholarship when she became eligible sophomore year, based on her GPA and extracurriculars like the Student Nurses Association and the Peer Educator Program. The additional funds defrayed major expenses like textbooks and housing. "The idea of graduating and beginning my career in a lot of debt was intimidating and stressful," she says. "This scholarship alleviated that."

Guerrero plans to be a NICU nurse for the duration of her career, while also branching out into early intervention care. And there's one other professional goal she hopes to fulfill. "I'm currently enrolled in Seton Hall's dual-degree program for a master's in nursing and a doctorate in nursing practice, which will allow me to teach," she says. "It's my dream to give back to the college as an instructor one day."



FEATURE STORY

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PRIESTS

SUPPORT FROM THE LILLY ENDOWMENT IS HELPING TO CULTIVATE LEADERS LIKE FATHER JOE, WHO BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO A JERSEY CITY CONGREGATION.

Father Joseph Furnaguera can pinpoint the moment he became certain of his calling. It was the spring of 2012, and two paths stretched out before him. One led to law school at Rutgers; the other led to the seminary at Seton Hall.

Furnaguera attended an event for students who'd been accepted to Rutgers Law but hadn't yet confirmed their enrollment. He listened as the academic dean spoke passionately about vocation and identity. "It hit me," Furnaguera recalls.



“That’s not who I am. I felt more called to be a man who represents the Church.”

In the fall of 2013, Furnaguera enrolled in Seton Hall’s Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), quickly distinguishing himself as one of the program’s top first-year students. At the end of Furnaguera’s second semester, the Newark Archdiocese selected him to complete his training over the next five years at Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, an honor bestowed on one student per class. After studying in the shadow of the Vatican, Furnaguera was ordained in the summer of 2018 and “Father Joe” began his ministry the following year at St. Paul the Apostle in Jersey City’s Greenville neighborhood. Since 2019, he has been promoted from parochial vicar to pastor, breathing new life into his congregation and rescuing a Catholic school along the way.

“I would be happy if I could stay right here the rest of my life and just continue reforming, reaching out, being on mission,” says Father Joe, now 36.

“My ambitions are for the community I serve.”

Father Joe’s efforts at St. Paul’s are a testament to ICSST’s mission of developing Catholic leaders who go on to make a difference in their communities. For decades, the Seminary has benefited from the support of individuals and organizations who embrace this mission.

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Among the top benefactors to ICSST and Seton Hall is Lilly Endowment Inc. Since 2002, the Indianapolis-based private foundation has made grants to the Seminary and the University that total more than \$8.3 million, including a “Preaching as Hospitality” grant.
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The grants have supported efforts to strengthen pastoral leadership and preaching, and to bolster Seton Hall programs that help students discern their vocations.

According to Dianne Traflet, J.D., S.T.D., associate dean for graduate studies and administration

and assistant professor of pastoral theology, philanthropic support like that from Lilly Endowment has bolstered ICSST’s outreach and programming as well as enabling the seminary to cultivate changemakers like Father Joe.

“With the endorsement of Lilly Endowment and other philanthropic individuals and institutions, we will continue to offer superb preparation in all respects to men who are committing themselves to Christ and the service of His faithful,” says Traflet. “Father Joe is one example of the hundreds of extraordinary men who have learned not only the sacramental and pastoral significance of the priesthood, but also the business of running a parish.”

At St. Paul’s, Father Joe’s business has ranged from restructuring the liturgy, parish council and finance council, to renewing youth initiatives, enhancing the church’s social media presence and resurrecting a parish feast that is now a highlight for the surrounding community. According to Father Joe, the number of weekly congregants has roughly doubled since he



FATHER JOSEPH FURNAGUERA

started. Ditto the weekly collection. “This parish had all the potential in the world, and I saw that from day one,” he says.

In 2023, St. Paul’s took Sacred Heart, an orphaned nearby elementary school with an unsettled future, under its wing. Together with Principal Joanne Gorman, Father Joe has streamlined operations while overseeing new initiatives like breakfast, after-school programs and extracurricular activities such as technology and art. Enrollment has risen from 154 to 172, Sacred Heart’s first increase since the Covid closures several years ago, and there are plans for the school to physically relocate to St. Paul’s. As Hoboken-based priest Father Alexander Santora wrote in *The Jersey Journal*, “The people of Greenville and beyond ... are happy to call St. Paul’s, and now Sacred Heart School, home because of [Father] Furnaguera.”

The son of Cuban immigrants who settled in Elizabeth, Furnaguera grew up in Springfield and attended Seton Hall Prep his freshman year before transferring back to his hometown’s public schools. It was at Prep that Furnaguera,

“*SETON HALL IS WITHOUT A DOUBT WHERE I RECEIVED A FOUNDATION FOR WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PRIEST. I ALMOST SAW MY EXPERIENCE AT SETON HALL AS A MICROCOSM OF WHAT A COMMUNITY SHOULD LOOK LIKE.*”
—Father Joe Furnaguera, VF

who’d been baptized Catholic but attended church only sporadically, first learned the “Our Father,” which he began to recite nightly. He played baseball at Rutgers University-Newark and pursued a major in philosophy, which sparked his interest in Catholic theology. A classmate from Furnaguera’s senior philosophy seminar referred him to the campus’s Catholic ministry, and his faith blossomed from there.

Furnaguera completed his sacraments through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and, after graduating from Rutgers, embarked on a year of monastic living with the Community of St. John, a Catholic order whose home monastery is in Illinois. “I thought, why not take this year and build a foundation in my faith,” he says. “It was a very powerful year.”

After Furnaguera chose the priesthood over law school, he had to decide where to pursue his clerical education. During his year of discernment living at the Emaus House in Newark, he got to know Seton Hall’s campus from attending various events with the seminarians there. “There was a credibility and an academic rigor,” Father Joe says of his decision to attend ICSST. Courses that had an impact on him include Father Thomas Guarino’s class on systematic theology (“He was just on fire, a true scholar”), Professor Ellen Scully’s class on Roman Catholic doctrine (“I ended up using a lot of her notes

during my time in the seminary”), and Father Doug Milewski’s class on Patristics (“Extremely inspiring”).

Though Father Joe completed his education in Rome, “Seton Hall is without a doubt where I received a foundation for what it means to be a priest,” he says. “I almost saw my experience at Seton Hall as a microcosm of what a community should look like.”

Father Joe hopes his story will encourage other young Catholic men to follow in his footsteps.

“I think they have to experience good examples of the priesthood,” he says. “Some of the priests I met at Seton Hall really gave me that example. I want more people to experience what the Church can do for them. When you encounter people who really love and are driven by the mission, I think guys will be inspired.”



THE POWER OF SPEECH

A SCHOLARSHIP AT SHMS PROPELLED OLIVIA NASISI'S CAREER HELPING OTHERS COMMUNICATE.

Olivia Nasisi '21/M.S. '23 first cultivated her interest in speech-language pathology as a teenager. It was her sophomore year at Montville Township Public High School, and she'd become a mentor for a special education class for students with disabilities such as Down syndrome and autism. A couple of times a week, a speech therapist would come in to work with the students. "We'd play 'restaurant' or all different sorts of role-playing scenarios to help them build their communication skills," Nasisi recalls. "I thought, this woman has the best job ever! It was a really valuable experience for me." Her senior year, she went on to shadow that same speech therapist outside of school. "It was really great to get perspective into the realm

of speech work, from a baby in the NICU to someone on their deathbed."

Nasisi followed her passion to Seton Hall, where she entered a six-year, dual-degree program that enables students to earn a master's in speech-language pathology at the School of Health and Medical Sciences (SHMS), after completing their undergraduate degree and certification in elementary and special education. "It's one of the few programs I'd seen that offered that," she says.

To pay for graduate school, Nasisi took out a loan, secured a grant and did whatever other work she could find, including babysitting and dog-sitting. On more than one occasion, she more or less emptied her bank account.

The Rita and Lawrence Salva Fellowship Fund was the first of its kind for the School of Health and Medical Sciences. The fund was established by Rita, M.A. '04 and Lawrence Salva to support fellowships specifically for SHMS students, like Nasisi.

"It was just a weight off my shoulders," says Nasisi. "I didn't have to take out a loan for my final semester, and it was a huge relief to go through that last semester and take my Praxis and graduate with a clear head and less debt in the end."

During her two years at SHMS, Nasisi benefited from the school's simulation labs, in which



professional actors assume the roles of patients. “It ensures a wide range of scenarios are taught, and they were able to curate them for us very specifically,” says Nasisi. “Afterward we would debrief and unpack everything that went on.” She also completed two clinical internships and an externship, which helped her land a job as a speech-language pathologist for the public school district in Newton, New Jersey. “Having the experience of being in clinical settings meant that I was able to be out in the field before graduating. It gave me a lot of different skills that I’m able to call upon now.”

Nasisi has continued her relationship with Seton Hall by establishing a partnership with the university to accept SHMS grad students for externships in her school district, where she’s up for tenure next year. She also returns to campus to participate in alumni panels and open houses for prospective students. “I enjoy coaching the next generation of speech therapists,” she says.

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“I ENJOY COACHING THE
NEXT GENERATION OF
SPEECH THERAPISTS.”

—Olivia Nasisi '21/M.S. '23, CCC-SLP

DIPLOMACY SCHOLARSHIPS

A SOLDIER'S LONG-LASTING LEGACY

ARMY CAPTAIN GREGORY T. DALESSIO '00/M.A. '04 DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY. BUT HIS SPIRIT LIVES ON IN STUDENTS LIKE ADREANNA DONES WHO SHARE A "COMMITMENT TO SERVING OTHERS."



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“MY ULTIMATE GOAL IN LIFE IS TO HELP OTHERS, AND THE DALESSIO SCHOLARSHIP WAS A GENEROUS CONTRIBUTION TO THAT PURSUIT.”

–Adreanna Dones,
Class of 2026

It was Adreanna Dones' first academic year at Seton Hall's School of Diplomacy and International Relations, and she was driving forward in her studies, with determination to finish strong. Dones, an aspiring lawyer from California's Bay Area, entered Seton Hall in 2023 with enough credits to make her a sophomore. Even though she anticipated earning her degree in only three years, she found herself needing further resources to remain a self-funded student.

Dones' advisor, Professor Martin Edwards, Ph.D, the School of Diplomacy's associate dean for academic and student affairs, encouraged her to explore the Captain Gregory T. Dalessio Memorial Scholarship, named for an Iraq War veteran and Seton Hall alumnus killed in the line of duty.

Recipients of the Captain Gregory T. Dalessio Memorial Scholarship must demonstrate the character traits and qualities that Dalessio personified, namely: "A strong commitment to serving others, relentless pursuit of excellence and leadership by example."

Dones had a strong track record in that regard, from volunteering as a tutor and organizing food banks to participating in a role model program for elementary school students and serving on the District Student Leadership Alliance in her native Alameda County, California. "That was my first realization that I can make change," she says.

Dones wrote about those experiences in her application for the Dalessio scholarship, which also requires a minimum GPA of 3.6. Professor Edwards' instincts were right: She got it.

Established by Dalessio's family in 2009, the scholarship keeps its namesake alive in legacy and spirit. The oldest of eight siblings, Dalessio earned his bachelor's degree from Seton Hall in 2000 and his master's from the School of Diplomacy in 2004. Four years later, not long after attending the dedication of a new playground for Iraqi children, the Cherry Hill native was killed in Baghdad during his second tour of duty. He was protecting his superior officer at the time, an act of bravery that earned him a posthumous Purple Heart, Bronze Star

and Combat Infantry Badge. "He got tough jobs done," a soldier who served alongside Dalessio said at his funeral.

Dalessio's mother, Maureen Pagano, and Dalessio's stepfather, Tom Pagano, got to meet Dones at Seton Hall last April, when they shared a table at the 2024 scholarship donor reception. "That was life-changing for me," says Dones, "to have that hands-on connection and see what [Dalessio] is still doing for this country — through his parents — by helping students like me. It was really significant the way they talked about him. I had a lot of emotions that day."

The Dalessio scholarship has reinforced Dones' steadfast drive to achieve her goals. After graduating, she plans to either do a fellowship or pursue a master's in linguistics before applying to law school. Ultimately, she wants to be a lawyer at the United Nations. "That would be my dream job," she says. "I like the idea of solving big world problems on an international scale."

LOWERING THE BARRIERS TO LEGAL EDUCATION

MICHAEL P. AMBROSIO AND JANICE GORDON GAVE ANGELICA MERCADO MORE THAN A SCHOLARSHIP — THEY HELPED HER BECOME A “CHANGEMAKER.”

During her final year at Seton Hall Law School, Angelica Mercado M.A./J.D. '21 took a class on legal positivism with Professor Michael P. Ambrosio, one of the school's longest-serving and most distinguished instructors. It was different than most of her coursework — more of a philosophy class, really. But it had a significant impact on Mercado, who often thinks about Ambrosio's teachings in her role as an associate at Einhorn Barbarito, a family law practice with offices in Manhattan and Denville, New Jersey.

“Legal positivism, as a theory, really brings to the forefront how morality plays into legally sound — or legally legitimate — rules

and norms,” she tells *IMPACT*. “Viewing family law through the lens of what's right is important, because an application of the law in a strict sense is not always the right solution. Sometimes the law doesn't account for nuances. Sometimes, we can use our creative legal minds to be guided by what's right — to work through a legal hurdle, or work through strict interpretations of what a rule might require, in order to arrive at a more just solution. It's not foolproof, but it highlights a lens of morality through which the law can be viewed.” That Mercado learned these lessons from Ambrosio makes them all the more meaningful to her.

Michael Ambrosio and his wife, Janice Gordon, have given more than \$4 million, much of which has funded a scholarship in their name aimed at students for whom a Seton Hall J.D. would otherwise be out of reach. Thirty-five such scholarships have been awarded to date.

Mercado was an Ambrosio scholar during her time at Seton Hall Law, after which she earned a master's in diplomacy and international relations as part of a dual-degree program. The Ambrosio scholarship mitigated the amount she had to take out in loans and helped with her living expenses. Without it, “I might not have gone to Seton Hall,” says Mercado. “I still





have loans to pay off, but I'm not afraid I'm going to carry them with me into retirement. It made my decision to go to Seton Hall all the more doable financially."

And for that, Mercado is immensely grateful. "My own father told me I was pursuing his dream — a dream he never had access to."

Mercado was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey, where she embraced her Puerto Rican heritage growing up in a tight-knit neighborhood brimming with Latin culture. "Even though I've never lived in Puerto Rico, I have a deep pride for that aspect of my identity," she says. The value of public service was instilled at a young age, between her father's work as a Newark police officer and her uncles' involvement in youth sports

leagues and local community organizations. "I anticipated living my life that way because that's the way I saw life lived."

After finishing eighth grade at Robert Treat Academy, a public charter in Newark, New Jersey, Mercado went to boarding school at St. Paul's in Concord, New Hampshire, where she fell in love with language, excelling in both Spanish and French. Then college took her to George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs.

"I had this interest in communicating with the masses, and I wanted to convert that into something practical for a career, something that would make a difference," Mercado says. "My initial interests were in policy spaces. I imagined myself going into international NGO types of spaces, or working for agencies, doing projects and pursuing initiatives in other regions of the world."

Toward the end of college, however, Mercado's perspective began to shift. "I realized that I wasn't going to be able to see the fruits of policy on a micro-level. The gratification I was looking



“THESE FINANCIAL GIFTS
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ELSE’S LIFE.”

—Angelica Mercado M.A./J.D. ’21

for was to see my work, my actions, my pursuits, my passions actually make a tangible change in an individual’s life.”

That’s why Mercado ended up pivoting to law school. In addition to her coursework as an Ambrosio scholar, she pursued an array of internships and volunteer opportunities, including serving as a co-president of the Latin American Law Student Association, a legal assistant with Seton Hall’s Center for Social Justice, and a student attorney for the International Human Rights Clinic and the Equal Justice Clinic (impact

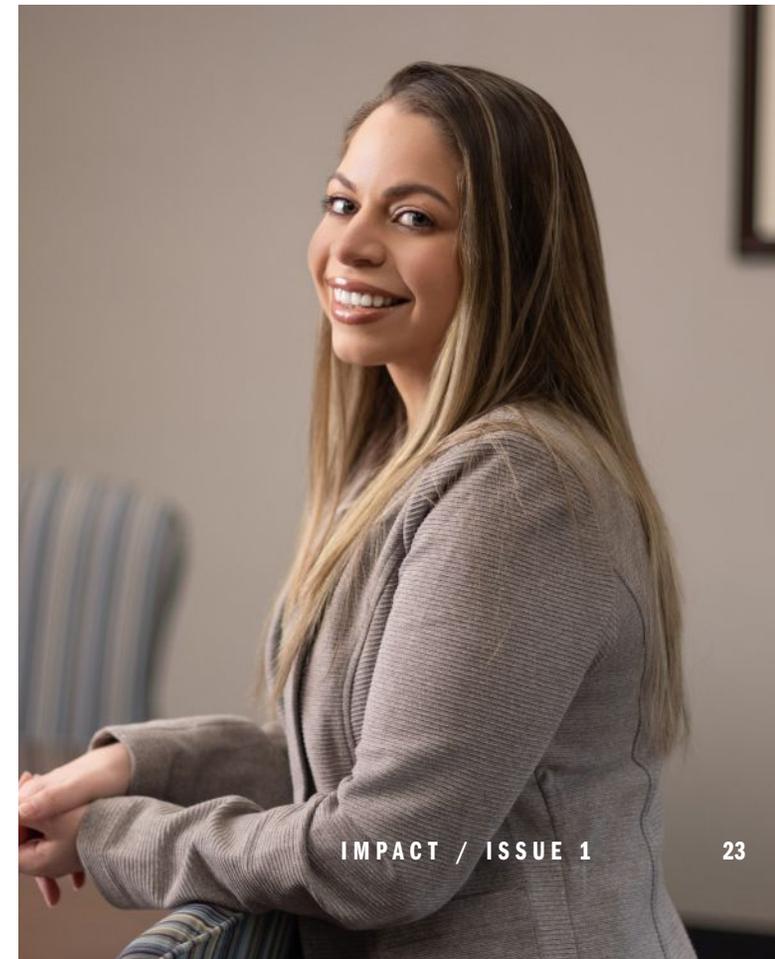
litigation). “I got so much real experience before even receiving my diploma,” Mercado recalls, “working with real clients and solving real-life issues, often successfully.”

A post-graduation clerkship for Somerset County, New Jersey, with Judge John McDonald (now the Somerset County prosecutor) sparked Mercado’s interest in family law. Today, in Mercado’s work for Einhorn Barbarito, a full-service firm with a renowned family law practice, her caseload ranges from domestic violence to divorce to child custody. She says she feels especially fulfilled helping people in crisis, which “relates back to core Catholic values.”

Mercado’s long-term ambition is to expand her pro bono work and take on international custody disputes through the Hague Convention. “It would tie back to my initial interest in international policy making, and it would expand the reach of the people I’m able to help,” she says.

As for Professor Ambrosio, Mercado will forever appreciate the career his scholarship helped her achieve. “There are a lot of people

who are motivated, who are passionate, who have the ability and potential and desire to make meaningful changes in our communities and society but who are hindered by financial barriers,” she says. “These financial gifts diminish a barrier that otherwise might prevent a changemaker from bettering somebody else’s life.”



GIVING BUSINESS STUDENTS REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

PROFESSOR MARK SCHILD HELPS STILLMAN STUDENTS PUT THEORIES TO PRACTICE BEFORE THEY GRADUATE.



“WHEN I FIRST GOT HERE I REALIZED THAT WE ONLY HAVE A MOMENT TO MAKE AN IMPACT AND SO WE WORK INCREDIBLY HARD TO MAKE EVERY MOMENT COUNT.”

—Mark Schild, M.B.A. '19, Associate Dean, Stillman School of Business

When Professor Mark Schild started teaching one class at Stillman School of Business in 2016, he had 30 years experience working for Drexel, Smith Barney, and then his own independent brokerage and investment advisory firm. “I knew halfway through the semester that this was what I wanted to do,” said Schild. He sold his business, started teaching full-time, and suddenly had a new bottom line: not the financial success of his business, but the education and inspiration of thousands of students eager to prepare themselves to change the world.

New to teaching — both undergrads and grad students — but having plenty of deep experience in the professional field, Schild quickly grasped

that although classrooms and textbooks provide a fundamental grounding, students need to be taught how to apply the theories they were learning to real-world scenarios in the field.

In 2023 Schild was promoted to Associate Dean for Student Success and now works closely with Dean Joyce Strawser on high-impact applied learning programming. Thanks to the Dean’s vision and the efforts of Schild and the supportive Stillman faculty, this mode of pedagogy is embedded in every program within Stillman.

The first thing that comes to mind when people hear “applied learning” is internships, and indeed they are one of the more valuable opportunities for students to apply theories

to practice. “School builds literacy while work creates competency,” Schild frequently remarks. He mused that when he arrived at Seton Hall, most business students would have one internship near the end of their course of study. “Now they all seem to have one or two and are working hard to find three or more.” A collateral effect of this demand for internships is that more alumni are engaging with the university, reconnecting with the campus to partner with Stillman in providing internships. In testimony to the superb education Stillman provides, many of these internships transition to full-time positions upon graduation.

The gift provided by Jim '82 and Judy O'Brien helps turn concepts learned in the classroom into practice, further developing and preparing the Seton Hall student for a transformative experience.

There are many other applied-learning opportunities beyond internships. These include the Digital Transformation Series where industry professionals share with students

essential insights into real-world IT needs, the CFA Institute Research Challenge where university teams conduct financial analysis and are judged by industry experts, and the high-stakes “Hall Street” Fund where students invest real money provided through an endowment.

“I tell them the key to investing is an opinion and a willingness to do some work to back up that opinion,” said Schild. “Learning to present your case and convince your fellow portfolio managers is a great real-world experience.”

When Schild looks back on his life before Stillman, there are similarities, but there is one big difference. “I was always in a service profession, helping people with planning for specific goals or for retirement. However, being at Seton Hall and working with students in the classroom, in the trading room, and through one-on-one advising has been an incredible experience. I feel like I am impacting students’ lives and helping them become more well-rounded and better overall human beings.”



CENTER FOR SPORTS MEDIA

GETTING INTO THE GAME

THE CENTER FOR SPORTS MEDIA RALLIES STUDENTS WITH “STARPOWER” AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARE “SECOND TO NONE.”

Aspiring sportscaster and Kansas native Jackson Shank '25 came to Seton Hall for its intimate atmosphere and proximity to America's largest media market. It just so happened that less than two months into Shank's freshman year, Seton Hall announced the creation of a Center for Sports Media that would supercharge his experience within the school's communications program. “Not only did I choose the right school, but I got here at the right time,” he says.

With a multiplatform mission to “redefine how students are trained” in sports media, the Center was established in the fall of 2021 thanks to a donation from longtime ESPN personality Bob Ley '76.

In addition to producing student content through Seton Hall's media channels and

partnerships with professional outlets, the Center also facilitates internships and access to luminaries in the field. As Ley noted when his gift was announced, “Seton Hall is uniquely positioned to assume a leadership role as we see this industry continually reshaped in front of our eyes.”

For Shank, that has involved landing an MLB Network internship through a networking event, rolling up his sleeves with leading digital mediums such as short-form video, and getting facetime with big shots like Peter King, Stephen A. Smith, Tom Rinaldi and Billie Jean King, whom he was able to interview for a social media clip.

“That's a lot of stardom for students to learn from,” says Shank, whose long-term goal is to become a broadcaster for a team or a major network. “The opportunities the Center has given us are second to none.”



NATIONAL SECURITY FELLOWSHIP

EARNING A SEAT AT THE TABLE AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT

TRAINING OUR COUNTRY'S NEXT LEADERS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES.

In April 2024, Emmanuel Ogundele '20 stepped into the corridors of power in our nation's capital. He was there as part of the National Security Fellowship (NSF) at Seton Hall's School of Diplomacy and International Affairs.

The George A. Laudato '63 National Security Fellowship Endowed Fund was established in memory of George Laudato by his wife, Janna. The fund gives graduate students real-world experience by assigning them a research project commissioned by a U.S. government agency.

George Laudato had a long career in foreign service at the United States Agency for International Development. After he died in 2022, his family wanted to uphold his legacy by helping students “demonstrate their ability to analyze geopolitical threats and opportunities.” The fellows are led by Professor Mohamad Mirghahari, who served in national security

posts during the Obama administration.

Ogundele's first project was for the U.S. Department of State. Before arriving in Washington, his NSF cohort spent months researching Russian and Chinese influence in Central and South America. They then presented their findings to officials from the State Department and the Pentagon.

“It was unreal,” says Ogundele, “to be sitting in front of senior-level officials whose seats we hope to be sitting in some day. The most rewarding part was seeing them take our policy recommendations seriously.”

Ogundele is grateful for the opportunity, and he says the fellowship has proven transformative in pursuing his goal of becoming a policy or risk analyst. “It has opened my eyes to different career paths within international relations,” he says. “The entire journey has just been extremely beneficial.”



THE LEGACY OF COACH COCCO

AS PART OF A GENEROUS ENDOWMENT, THE LATE SETON HALL PIRATES LEGEND MIKE COCCO LIVES ON IN A NEWLY-NAMED BASEBALL BULLPEN.

One day after the close of the 1987 Major League Baseball season, the Seton Hall Pirates got word that a legend was en route to their subterranean batting cages: 18-time New York Yankees All-Star and 10-time World Series champ Yogi Berra, who lived up the road in Montclair.

At the time, Berra was bench coach of the Houston Astros, who had recently drafted star Pirates catcher Craig Biggio '87, a future MLB Hall of Fame inductee with a celebrated professional career in store. Longtime Pirates coach Mike "Shep" Sheppard, who was friendly with Berra, knew Berra and Biggio hadn't met in person. That gave Sheppard an idea for a practical joke. He told the Pirates' husky

assistant coach, Mike Cocco '86, to squeeze his 250-pound, 5-foot-7 frame into an Astros shirt and start catching balls.

When Berra arrived with Astros third base coach Matt Galante and laid eyes on the heavy-set young man he'd been tricked into believing was his first-round draft pick, he looked puzzled. He told Galante, who'd been furtively let in on the shenanigans, "We'll make a player out of him."

Sheppard motioned Cocco over. "When Yogi came in," Cocco fondly recalled in David Siroty's 2002 book, *The Hit Men and the Kid Who Batted Ninth*, "Shep introduced Yogi to 'Craig Biggio,' but it was me. Yogi looked at me,



looked at Matt Galante, and [said], as only Yogi could say, 'He must be some phenom!'"

Cocco, who died of a heart attack in April 2024, was himself a legend among the Seton Hall community. And the Yogi Berra prank was just one of the many stories about him that former teammates, players and loved ones keep in their hearts.

"He was a true blue Seton Hall Pirate," says Biggio. "Back in the day, I would always travel with Mike and the equipment in his red van. When you spend a lot of time together driving all over New Jersey you really get to know someone. Mike's legacy for Seton Hall will never be forgotten."



“MIKE’S DEDICATION TOUCHED COUNTLESS LIVES. IT’S AN HONOR TO PLAY A PART IN PRESERVING HIS LEGACY.”

–Steve Waldis ’89

That legacy includes degrees from Seton Hall Prep and Seton Hall University, where Cocco served the Pirates for four years as a student manager, and for another five as a graduate assistant and then an assistant coach. His tenure included two NCAA Baseball Regionals and the 1987 Big East tournament, which the Pirates won. After moving on from the baseball program, Cocco maintained a presence at Pirates games and in the dugout, continuing to live the team’s signature mantra: “Never Lose Your Hustle.” According to former Pirates teammate John Morris, who went

on to play for the Kansas City Royals, “He represents everything that is good and right about Seton Hall.”

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As of this spring, Cocco’s legacy has literally been set in stone with the naming of the Pirates bullpen in his memory: “Cocco’s Corner.” The titular tribute dovetails with a seven-figure gift from Seton Hall alumni Stephen and Stacey Waldis, whose Stacey ’90 and Stephen ’89 Waldis Baseball Coach Endowment will help finance coaching salaries and operational costs.

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As Cocco’s wife, Beth Cocco, tells *IMPACT*, “Seton Hall baseball was so important to him. He was always such a champion and advocate for the program. The fact that they’ve done this is just amazing. He would be so happy. It’s an absolutely tremendous honor for him and for our family.”

A native of Orange, New Jersey, where he grew up the youngest of five children, Michael

Anthony Cocco attended Catholic school from the age of six and became involved with organized sports at Seton Hall Prep, where he managed the football, wrestling and baseball teams. He earned a scholarship to Seton Hall University as a student team manager.

“His gift was coaching and managing,” says Beth. “Baseball was always his favorite sport.”



“HE WAS A TRUE BLUE SETON HALL PIRATE ... MIKE’S LEGACY FOR SETON HALL WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.”

–Craig Biggio ’87



LEFT: MIKE COCCO AND COACH SHEPPARD, SR.

After stepping down from his assistant coaching position with the Pirates, Cocco embarked on a career in security operations, first at St. Barnabas, where he was introduced to Beth by a mutual colleague in 1998. Two years later, they got married at Seton Hall’s Chapel of the Immaculate Conception. Exiting the chapel, they walked beneath a canopy of baseball bats held aloft by members of Seton Hall’s high school and university teams.

Cocco maintained close ties to Seton Hall not only by attending games, but also by assisting with baseball camps and coaching Seton Hall Prep players during the summer. He trained future Major Leaguers like Eric Duncan, who was drafted by the Yankees straight out of the Prep, and Rick Porcello, who pitched in the Majors for 12 years and won a Cy Young Award with the Boston Red Sox. Cocco also coached youth baseball and



COCCO'S CORNER WITH COCCO, STEVE WALDIS (FAR RIGHT) AND FELLOW PIRATES

softball in Florham Park, New Jersey, where he and Beth raised their children. Both Mikey (22) and Molly (20) coach and are following in their father’s footsteps.

“My dad enjoyed being able to make a difference in the lives of his players no matter the level he was coaching,” says Mikey. “A lot of my friends would refer to him as ‘Pops,’ ‘Dad’ and ‘Coach’ on and off the field.” Adds Molly, “I grew up surrounded by Seton Hall baseball. Dad never missed a chance to catch up with a former player. The Stacey ’90 and Stephen ’89

Waldis Baseball Coach Endowment just proves how much of a family this program is.”

On the evening of Sunday, April 21, 2024, Cocco had just enjoyed what his family now refers to as the “perfect Cocco weekend.” He golfed with a former coaching pal, enjoyed a Friday-night meal at his favorite Florham Park Italian joint, watched Molly play on her school softball team at Stockton University, conducted a pitching lesson, and spent Sunday afternoon watching a Pirates game at Seton Hall. Afterward, the Coccos and some friends drove to Mike’s childhood stomping ground for an early dinner at Libretti’s in Orange. Then they went home, where Mikey, himself a baseball coach, shared the news with his dad that his team had just won its first tournament. At some point not long after that, as Cocco relaxed on the couch watching golf on T.V., his heart stopped beating. “The one thing we take comfort in is that he didn’t suffer,” says Beth.

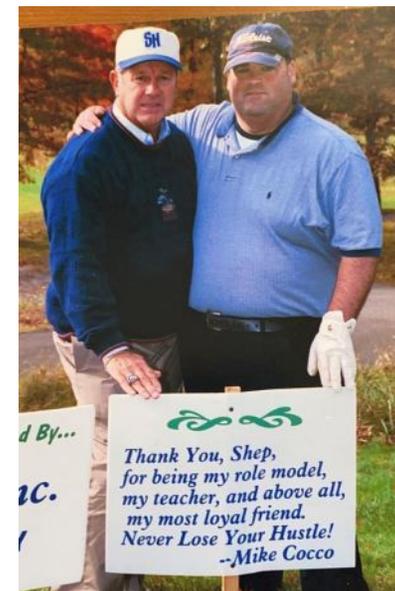
Six days later, mourners filled Holy Family Roman Catholic Church in Florham Park. Beth began her eulogy with a joke: “I promise to keep



my remarks short, unlike Mike’s Seton Hall Prep Hall of Fame induction speech.”

She continued, “Mike believed life is a lot like baseball. You think a fastball is coming, but then you’re thrown a curve.”

It was a metaphor that perfectly captured Cocco’s spirit. Thanks to the naming of the Pirates bullpen in his honor, that spirit will live on with the team.



A CRITICAL RESOURCE FOR OUR PIRATES

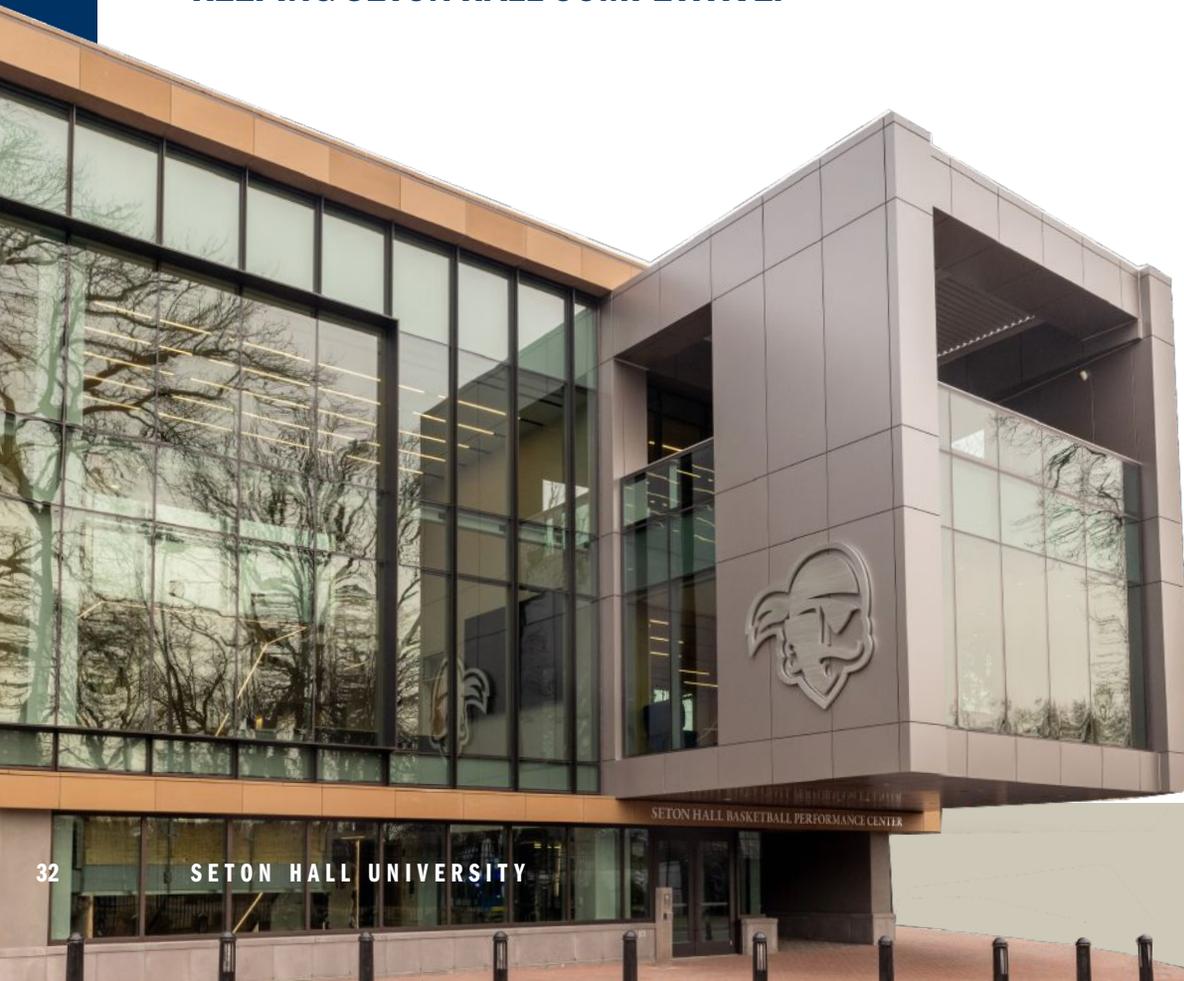
THE NEW BASKETBALL PERFORMANCE CENTER IS KEEPING SETON HALL COMPETITIVE.

For more than a decade, Seton Hall has been committed to equipping its teams and community with state-of-the-art athletic and recreational facilities. The latest milestone is the unveiling of the new Basketball Performance Center, located within the Richie Regan Recreation & Athletic Center on the South Orange campus.

The 13,000-square-foot facility offers our men's basketball student-athletes access to a dedicated practice gym, modern locker rooms, strength and conditioning spaces, a film room, a players' dining hall, and more.

The Basketball Performance Center is a key step in Seton Hall's plan to build a perennial Top 25 program — attracting top talent, meeting the needs of today's student-athletes, and preparing the Pirates to compete for conference and national titles.

This vision has been made possible thanks to the generosity of our dedicated Pirate fans. Their transformative support will help Seton Hall recruit elite student-athletes, provide a “home away from home” for the Pirates, optimize competitiveness through cutting-edge training resources and elevate Seton Hall's profile on the national and international stage.





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“TODAY IS A MILESTONE, MARKING A NEW ERA IN SETON HALL ATHLETICS. THIS FACILITY WILL GIVE OUR BASKETBALL PROGRAM UNRIVALED ADVANTAGES IN COMPETITION AND ON THE RECRUITING TRAIN. SIMPLY PUT, WE HAVE BUILT ONE OF THE FINEST BASKETBALL FACILITIES, NOT ONLY IN THE BIG EAST, BUT IN THE COUNTRY.”

– Bryan Felt '97/M.A. '05, Director of Athletics and Recreation during the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on March 26, 2025



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