Students of Grit

LESSONS IN THE CLASSROOM COME TO LIFE

One summer morning this past August, Justin Hineline (’17) awoke at 1:30 a.m. to complete a 12-mile foot march lugging a 50 lb ruck sack. He had to complete the march in 3 hours or he would fail to graduate from Sabalauski Air Assault School in Ft. Campbell, Kentucky.

How did he do it? “My training provided an opportunity for me to grow in resiliency. Air Assault School was both physically and academically rigorous. I knew I had to stay focused and study hard in order to pass each individual event so I could pass the course,” Justin explained. Justin is studying Electrical Engineering with a certificate in Physics at UW-Madison all while completing the Army ROTC program, so he is no stranger to hard work.

Yet, he points back to his time at St. Ambrose (SAA) as when he began to develop habits that have brought him to where he is today: “I was confident in my ability to study hard enough to pass [now] because I learned how to do so at a young age.”

While Justin has accomplished some great personal goals, he continues to set a high bar for himself, with ambitious plans to enter law school after his Army service.

Mariana Antonio-Serrano, SAA junior, is also setting a high bar for herself (although her story doesn’t involve helicopters, at least not yet). Mariana isn’t marching, but she is running. When she joined the cross-country team as a 7th grader, Mariana could run for about 3 minutes continuously. Although she was athletic, she lacked endurance.
But, her cross-country coach taught her about grit, how to push herself and trust her body that she had what it took to run for a long time, even in a race. “90% of running is a mental game,” Mariana reflected. “You have to convince yourself to keep going. Cross-country is the training of the mind and body.” By the end of that season, Mariana could run 20 minutes continuously.

Mariana continued to apply the desire to improve and what she learned through athletics: “That mental toughness has seeped into my academic and general life.” One opportunity was algebra class in 8th grade. When algebra didn’t come easily to her, Mariana had a choice to make. Would she let algebra bring down her GPA? “I knew I had to work harder,” she remembered. So, Mariana worked closely with her teacher, Mrs. Swanson, and in the end, earned a good grade. Mariana has learned a lesson that will prove valuable long after algebra class – that small victories can lead to even greater success: “I didn’t completely overcome that obstacle – I’m still not great at math – but...I’m proud that I pushed through.”

Mariana’s skills and determination are enriching her home parish, too. This past year, a youth group formed and Mariana attended the first meeting. She immediately recognized how she could help as a student leader who could work with the adult coordinators to give the new program structure and make it something both fun and spiritually beneficial.

She knew she was uniquely positioned to help the youth group because of her love for and knowledge of the Catholic faith, which had been nurtured at SAA. Throughout the past year, she has been able to prepare and give spiritual talks and spearhead activities, perfectly gauged for her peers.

While “grit” isn’t a class at SAA, it is a skill that SAA imparts through the classical curriculum and extracurriculars. In this close-knit environment, each student is supported to rise to the challenge of whatever is presented in front of them and to cultivate virtues like resilience and perseverance. Justin and Mariana are certainly students of grit and with these habits and skills, they’ll go far!
In late August, Alex (‘10) and Ava (‘15) Marsland were blessed to meet Pope Francis on their honeymoon in Rome! While many SAA alumni have married, Alex and Ava are the first pair of SAA alumni to marry each other. Congratulations to the newlyweds and prayers for you as you begin your married life together!

New Debut
JH GIRLS’ VOLLEYBALL TEAM BEGINS
Lisa Schell’s daughter Penny just started 6th grade in September, but that didn’t stop new parent Lisa from approaching Principal Schmiesing about starting a junior high girls’ volleyball team, the first one with exclusively SAA athletes.

Lisa was a 4-time letter winner and Big 10 Champion at UW-Madison and is a dynamic person and confident coach. This was an opportunity Mr. Schmiesing couldn’t refuse!

“It would be my honor to teach [the players] a game I absolutely loved to play. I wanted to share my love for competition with the girls and also teach them how to be good competitors, teammates and friends.” Coach Schell is also adding a spiritual twist: “We also talk about growing in virtues like justice and temperance.”

Although the volleyball team lost their first weekend of matches, Coach Schell’s approach is working. Penny is applying her mom’s coaching on the court and in the classroom: “I can express my friendships to my teammates on the court and [use] the ability to try harder and never give up (persevere) in my studies. I can also practice my kindness and fairness (justice) on the court [and demonstrate them] during school to all of the other students.” 7th grader Sophie Matenaer is excited to learn more about St. Sebastian, the patron saint of athletes, while she also masters volleyball fundamentals. “Mrs. Schell’s a great coach!” Sophie added.

At the end of the day, regardless of their record, these players will grow together and gain confidence, both as athletes and as young women. “The drive from Columbus into Madison was a hoot,” said Coach Schell. “The girls sang, laughed and enjoyed a team meal at Culvers. The team-bonding time is all part of growing as a young person and figuring out what God wants for each of these girls.” Go, Guardians!

Fresh Look For 2019-2020
The Ambrosian has a new look! As the school continues to look ahead at a bright future, The Ambrosian is getting a fresh look as we share the highlights, successes and exciting information about St. Ambrose Academy. Did you know that Doctor of the Church St. Ambrose, is referred to as the ‘Honey-Tongued Doctor’? This title was initially bestowed because of his speaking and preaching ability, used by the Lord to lead the Church in many ways including official Church councils and the conversion of the great St. Augustine. This title led to the use of a beehive and bees in his iconography, symbols which also indicate wisdom.

St. Ambrose’s ability to articulate and share the faith while shaping the culture around him is an inspiration to SAA and the daily mission to form young people to rise to greatness and be leaders - in the classroom, in their families, and in the world!
“Music and movement have always been passions of mine,” said Josh Vaughn, new Music and Physical Education teacher at SAA. “I have always enjoyed being active!” he added, which is good because our Ambrosians will certainly keep him busy this school year! After school, Mr. Vaughn will also assist with two-hand-touch football for the middle school boys.

Mr. Vaughn comes well prepared. With music and movement a part of his life from a very young age, Mr. Vaughn pursued a degree in Piano Performance from the University of South Alabama and continued with a Master’s degree in Instrumental Conducting at Georgia Southern University. He has been involved in opera, gives Zumba instruction, and just finished composing his first musical (stay tuned for more!). It was Mr. Vaughn’s wife, Nicole, a Master’s student in Flute Performance and Pedagogy at UW-Madison, who brought him and his energy to Madison.

There are a few maxims that Mr. Vaughn presents to his students. First, “Teamwork makes the dream work.” His choirs and teams must cooperate to improve. While both physical education and music serve to round out a student’s development, Mr. Vaughn points out music especially as a solution in today’s culture: “Music is medicine.” He explains to his music students, “We have a chance to show [people who are suffering] the love of God through the beauty of music.” Mr. Vaughn certainly has many gifts to share with the SAA family – welcome, Mr. Vaughn!