

The Leader

A newsletter for benefactors, alumni, and friends of Saint Mary's University



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University
OF MINNESOTA

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Spring Issue, 2020

Scholarship honors memory of a lifelong learner

Renee Torbenson said her son, Ryan (Torbenson) Waddick, was always very eager to learn — no matter the subject. He especially relished opportunities to add quirky and trivial facts into conversations.

Waddick was only one credit shy of his certificate in Geographic Information Science (GIS), when a brain tumor tragically took his life in 2016. He was 32.

For anyone fortunate enough to come in contact with Waddick, he was as much a teacher as a learner.

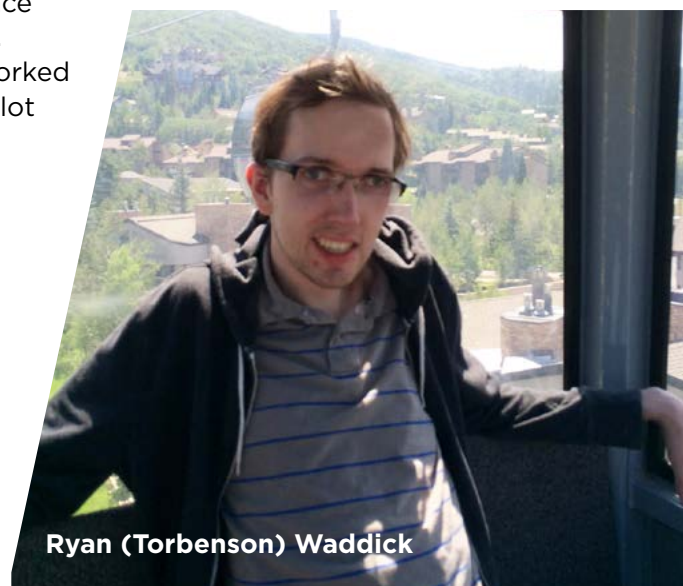
Waddick was born with Neurofibromatosis, and for the first 28 years of his life, the symptoms were manageable. Soon after he began studying at Saint Mary's, a brain tumor began to affect his vision and balance.

"He would take a class and have to drop out for a semester to undergo medical treatments," Torbenson said. "But he just kept persisting. He never really wanted to be defined by his illness or his health challenges. He didn't want that kind of attention."

John Ebert, program director for the M.S. in Data Intelligence and GeoAnalytics program, said Waddick never saw his illness as a hindrance but instead more of a motivation. "He confronted challenges and worked through them," he said. "He had a lot of grit. He didn't let his physical disability prevent him from doing what he wanted to accomplish."

For these reasons, Waddick was awarded his certificate posthumously.

*Ryan Waddick Memorial Scholarship article
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Ryan (Torbenson) Waddick

Ryan Waddick Memorial Scholarship ...

Greta Poser, associate professor in the GIS program, said the lessons Waddick taught her were the virtues of kindness, gratitude, and hope — even in the midst of challenges.

And now Waddick's family has set up a scholarship in his name to benefit graduate students who may be overcoming challenges of their own. They'll soon have an opportunity to meet the first two recipients.

Torbenson said that her son has often been described as genuine, kind, persistent, determined, grateful, and appreciative. But there was also a more humorous side to Waddick. "He had a real dry wit," she said. "He loved everything from political satire to Bob Dylan. We could always count on him, even during his illness, to make us laugh, even in the most difficult situations. He never complained."

Torbenson and her husband, Pat Waddick, said a scholarship was a way for them to honor their son's positivity, persistent attitude, and his love of learning. "He had a great experience at Saint Mary's," she said. "He already had a degree in geography and had an interest in history and mapping and computers, so studying GIS really seemed to spark his interests. He really felt it was a positive place, and he enjoyed his professors. They were always encouraging.

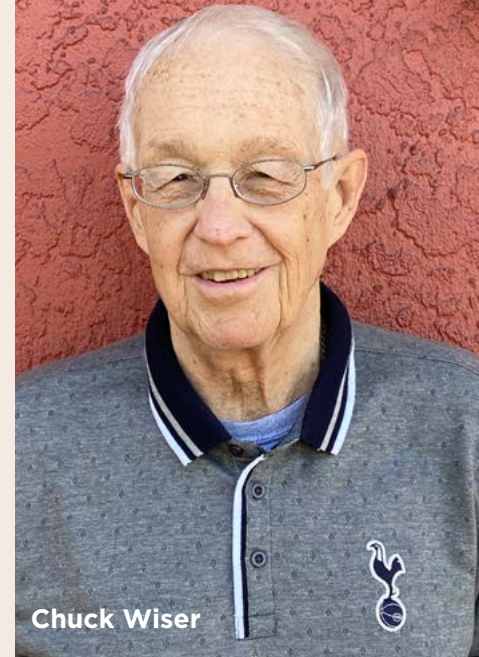
"It was a natural thing to try to help somebody else who is pursuing a graduate degree and needs some financial help," Torbenson said. "We wanted to honor his memory in a positive way."

The Ryan Waddick Memorial Scholarship will provide an annual source of financial assistance for graduate students attending Saint Mary's Twin Cities Campus who have a financial need and who are pursuing a degree or program certificate through the School of Business and Technology.

Candidates are asked to write an essay about any personal challenge they've had.

For Waddick's parents, there's a great comfort in knowing their son's legacy will live on in these students.

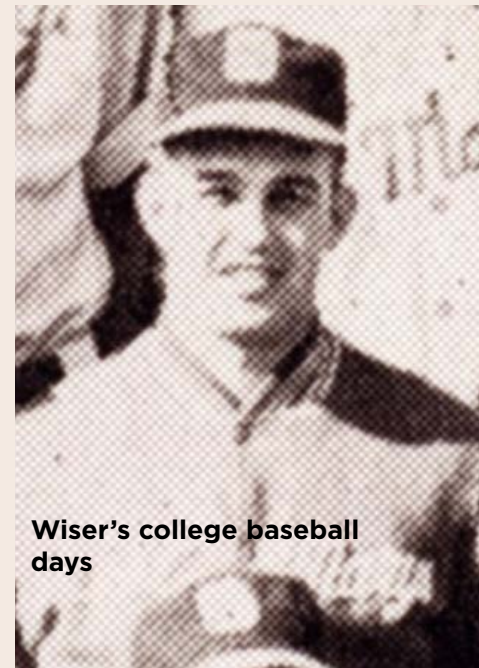
"Our hope is to help someone move forward and get through something," Torbenson said. "It's a way to keep his memory alive."



Chuck Wiser



**Wiser's senior year
at Saint Mary's**



**Wiser's college baseball
days**

Wiser helps to leave the world a better place

Chuck Wiser '56 has been in downsizing mode. In retirement, he's sold off his homes and given away many of his possessions. He now splits his year between St. Paul and Florida. He relishes in the fact his life is simpler (and that he spends his winters in a significantly warmer climate).

After a successful career in the Navy (more than three years active duty followed by more than 16 years in the Navy Reserve, retiring as a Commander) and banking and travel (a remarkable 40 years), he's focusing on helping others.

"You do what you can," he said. "If you do well in life, you've got to do something purposeful with your money, not just spend it on yourself — if you can find programs where people are being helped by it."

He and his late wife, Mary, had long supported underserved populations. A social worker, Mary became the director of volunteer services at Courage Center in Golden Valley, Minn. "I became more involved with diverse communities because of her," Chuck said.

About 25 years ago, the couple, who then owned a home in Scottsdale, Ariz., met an African American Franciscan, the Rev. Jim Goode, through their church during Black History Month. They became interested in his organization, Solid Ground Ministry out of New York, which helps the homeless and the poor, particularly African American and Puerto Rican families. Though Mary passed away 17 years ago, Wiser continues to believe in and support this organization.

A few years ago, Wiser heard about Saint Mary's First Generation Initiative (FGI) but felt his philanthropic funds were already committed.

Once a member of the Saint Mary's baseball team, Wiser sponsored a locker for he and one of his teammates in the new baseball clubhouse at the university. At that time, he became reacquainted with the university and learned more about the FGI program. As a first-generation student himself, it sparked his interest.

"It's feeding the same kind of population," he said. "What it's doing is providing someone with an opportunity they wouldn't otherwise have. The FGI program just kind of picks up where some of these other programs I work with leave off."

Wiser began supporting FGI but — because of his downsizing — was able to increase his gift to \$10,000 this year. He believes it's a worthy investment. "When these kids go to school, the first semester is the hardest adjustment," he said. "They go in with limited resources. The idea of bringing them down to campus to get familiar [through the summer Countdown to College program] is great. For many, it's the first time they've been away from home, and it gets them a little more acclimated to what they're going to run into, so their chances of succeeding are much more than if they were coming in cold."

He said it is reaffirming to know graduates of the program serve as role models to younger family members and friends. "Those who struggle to get through appreciate what people have done for them, and then they go back and help somebody else," Wiser said. "Having a role model is so critical."

Though the Lasallian commitment to service and community wasn't defined as Lasallian back when Wiser was a student, he says he always knew the Christian Brothers cared about their students.

A native Chicagoan, Wiser chose Saint Mary's because he wanted to play sports and get a good education. "And, coming from De La Salle [Institute], I liked the Christian Brothers and their approach," he said. "At the time, 90% of faculty at Saint Mary's were Christian Brothers. The percentage of Ph.D.s among faculty members was higher than the University of Minnesota. We had a lot of very bright people and very good people. I enjoyed my stay there."

Wiser's philanthropic motto is simple: "Think of all of the billions of people who have lived throughout history," he said. "So much emphasis has been put on doing things to better yourself, rather than doing good for somebody else. It's about leaving this world a little better place."

Saint Mary's University receives \$1.7 million grant to develop character and virtue programs for educational administrators

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota has been awarded a \$1,732,643 grant from The Robert D. and Patricia E. Kern Family Foundation for the university's School of Education Character and Virtue Initiative.

Using grant funding, Saint Mary's will develop an enhanced curriculum for current and future educational leaders that places a strong emphasis on moral character, virtue, and ethics. The course content will be enhanced using the University of Birmingham's (UK) Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue framework. It will be customized to align with the Lasallian Virtues of a Teacher and the Cardinal Virtues matrix already informing the university's mission and practices.

"Saint Mary's is a Lasallian Catholic university with a strong reputation for preparing the majority of our state's educators and educational administrators, and — thanks to this generous grant from the Kern Family — we will strengthen the licensing programs for principals and superintendents, as well as directors of special education, by placing character and virtue education philosophies and practices into current programming," said Father James P. Burns, IVD, Ph.D., president of Saint Mary's. "This initiative aims to change the face of education today by equipping educational administrators with the framework for virtue that needs to be at the forefront in our schools, and in the hearts and minds of those leading our schools."

Other components of the initiative include establishing an annual retreat on character and virtue in leadership, developing a School of Character Designation, designing a character and virtue professional development series for partner schools, and creating online modules. In addition, Saint Mary's will explore other program pathways and credentials related to this theme that includes microcredentials, certificates, and additional degrees.

"We are incredibly grateful to the Kern Family Foundation for their partnership with us on this important initiative," said Audrey Kintzi, vice president for Advancement and Communication at Saint Mary's. "School administrators have an arduous but extremely important job, and as they face the many challenges that exist in today's education systems, our goal is to arm them to lead with integrity and to set an example for their faculties and staff and the students in their care."

"Our School of Education prides itself in being one of the state's largest providers of principal, superintendent, and director of special education candidates," said Lynn Albee, Ed.D., interim dean of Education. "Through our collaborative relationship with eduCATE, we are able to positively impact the educational experiences of students in Wisconsin as well. This is an exciting opportunity for Saint Mary's Educational Administration program to really make a difference in the lives of Midwest school leaders, as well as the children in schools."

ABOUT THE LEADER

The stories and successes shared in each issue of *The Leader* highlight the extraordinary impact benefactors are making on the programs and people at Saint Mary's through their leadership gifts. *The Leader* is a quarterly publication.

For more information about any of the stories printed in this publication or how to make a gift to Saint Mary's University, contact:

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Leadership Society

Vision, compassion, and commitment are all characteristics of leadership. Each year hundreds of alumni, parents, and friends provide leadership support to Saint Mary's. The Leadership Society recognizes generous individuals and organizations who give \$1,000 or more to Saint Mary's University on an annual basis. The generosity of this group enables Saint Mary's to enhance

the outstanding academic, leadership, and service-learning experiences we offer our students. Whether left unrestricted to the Saint Mary's Fund or designated to specific initiatives, leadership gifts make a real difference in transforming the lives of our students.

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