

The Leader

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



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FGI benefactors become second family

John '67 and Mary (Yule) CST'69 Jelinek had never seen Jessica Salas-Rivera '19 in person until she walked across the commencement stage.

The Minnetonka couple had philanthropically supported Salas-Rivera throughout her educational journey as a Saint Mary's First Generation Scholar.

Although they had exchanged cards and letters through the years, the opportunity to meet never presented itself ... until commencement.

"On graduation day, I actually bumped into Mr. Jelinek before I even found my parents and I remember him introducing himself to me and telling me that he was proud of me," Salas-Rivera said. "When those words came out of his mouth, I felt a warm feeling in my chest because even though I did not know him personally, he felt like family."

Salas-Rivera said that when she was younger, attending a four-year college was never in her plans. Then, as a middle schooler, she began to dream when a guidance counselor told her about the opportunity to attend Saint Mary's summer college preparation program called Countdown to College. Once

Jelinek article continued on page 2



Jelinek and Salas-Rivera families

Benefactors become family ...

accepted into the program, she was told she could apply for the First Generation Initiative Scholarship.

“On April 1, 2015, my cousin gave me an envelope that had the Saint Mary’s logo on it,” she remembers. “It was around the time when we were told that we were going to receive the response to whether we were awarded the scholarship or not, but it was also April Fool’s Day and I was afraid of it being a prank. When I opened the envelope, I just remember reading the word ‘congratulations’ and I began to cry and my cousin had to finish reading it for me.”

The Jelineks said it was important for them to watch Salas-Rivera cross the stage. “She was the first in her family and so was I when I graduated,” John said. “I understood what it meant to have parents and family there. My dad died when I was 12 years old. So my mom put me through school. I probably don’t know all of the sacrifices she made.”

Mary believes their bond was strengthened that day. “As much as you are committed to helping that person, when you haven’t actually met them, there’s a distance there and once you’ve exchanged hugs and been able to look each other in the eye, it’s a real connection,” she said.

The Jelineks have felt so fulfilled in their donation, they are committed to supporting an incoming FGI student and taking the journey again. They have found it an incredibly meaningful way to give back.



John '67 and Mary (Yule) CST'69 Jelinek with First Generation Initiative graduate Jessica Salas-Rivera '19.

“It was the idea of giving a hand up to somebody who may not have had the opportunities that both John and I had when we were making our college choices, wanting to pass on the gift of education that we have had to a new family, and just feeling really committed to the idea of leaving the world better than we found it,” Mary said.

John agrees and says simply, “We can give back what life, Saint Mary’s, and God has given us.”

Salas-Rivera will never forget the Jelineks.

“If it wasn’t for them and their investment in my education, crossing that stage would have been more of a dream than a reality,” she said. “I was able to thank them in person for believing in me. My parents were also able to talk to them and thank them for helping to see their first born achieve a milestone that they did not have the opportunity to achieve. The Jelineks and other

donors were able to remove a financial burden off of my parents’ shoulders and for that I will be forever grateful.”

Mary, who taught at a Catholic elementary school throughout her career, was excited to hear that Salas-Rivera will be teaching second grade in the elementary school she once attended, Sojourner Truth Academy. They know their gift will have a ripple effect.

“I think it’s wonderful that Saint Mary’s has committed to having a program like this that can really make a difference in the lives of these young people and the communities they come from,” Mary said. “I’m familiar with the school she will be teaching at, and there are a lot of needs on the north side of Minneapolis. Those kids need the kind of teacher I believe Jessica will become.”

“We helped her, and now this lady is going to help how many kids in her lifetime. It’s just passing it all down,” John said. “It’s the concept of stewardship. It’s the right thing to do.”

Fraternity creates scholarships based on principles

There hasn't been an Alpha Phi Omega chapter at Saint Mary's for approximately 15 years. But the alumni who still proudly call each other "brothers" are carrying forward the fraternity's mission of service — by raising money for scholarships.

Joe Hettinger '87 said the group, which was started in 1967 and boasts about 300 members, held two big anniversary events, a 45th in 2012, and a 50th in 2017 in Winona. "Each time we had between 70-85 alums attend, and the nice thing was we had attendees from the 1960s, '70s, '80s, and '90s," he said. "We spanned four decades."

Hettinger said being an APO member was a family tradition. "My older brother graduated in class of 1984 and I took his word when he said these are some nice guys who do some nice things for the community," he said. "My fraternity brothers are some of the best friends I've ever had or will ever have. They mean a lot to me."

A core group of APO brothers began dreaming about a way they could give back to their alma mater, which led to the establishment of the Alpha Phi Omega - Sigma Theta Chapter Leadership, Friendship, and Service Scholarship. The idea, and the individual scholarships, are based on the fraternity's three principles.

"Leadership" — This scholarship is in honor of the chapter's founding fathers of the late 1960s and the chapter presidents throughout history.

"Friendship" — These two scholarships are in memory of the late Don "Hollywood" Ivansek '83 and the late Grove Holman '85, both dedicated, hardworking, and well-loved members of the Saint Mary's community who were instrumental in the fraternity. Holman was Hettinger's roommate for one year who passed away suddenly at the age of 23. Hettinger fondly remembers him as "smart, energetic, and going 100 miles an hour." Ivansek, who died in 2018, was the person Hettinger said everyone gravitated toward. "He was the Pied Piper and his passing shook a

lot of us," he added. "He loved Winona, Saint Mary's, the people, and the fraternity."

"Service" — This one recognizes Scott "Sweet Music" Stelmok '91, a 20-year member of the New York City Police Department and a first responder in the attacks of Sept. 11. Stelmok rummaged through debris and emergency vehicles in order to recover any weapons inside and his death in 2014 was determined to be a result of his work at Ground Zero. Friends and family remember him as someone who had little concern for his own welfare; his goal was to save lives. "We wanted to honor him for his service," Hettinger said. "There's nothing more honorable than helping others, especially during something as monumental and life changing as 9/11."

With these scholarships, Hettinger said these men will not be forgotten. And, their legacy will live on in four deserving student recipients each year.

The group hopes to raise between \$100,000 to \$150,000, so that the scholarships can continue in perpetuity. Hettinger said sizeable gifts and pledges have already been secured. And he personally is leading the charge with a generous leadership pledge.

"If we can give out four scholarships annually, forever, to four worthy students, we think that's a pretty cool thing," he said. "I know a lot of alumni who are looking for a connection back to the school that's more personal to them. They still have a fondness for their time here and for the fraternity."

Other members of the APO Leadership-Friendship-Service Scholarship Committee: Tony Piscitiello '69, Tom Smat '77, Pat Smith '80, Mark Reczek '79, Jamie McKnight '92, Pat Hughes '81, John Sabados '73, Tom Battis '93, Bill Geheren '90.

For more information, contact Adam Stasica '07, M'11, M'17 at astasica@smumn.edu.



Supporting future environmental leaders

Mike '69 and Becky Stinson of Apple Valley, Minn., have long been champions of the environment.

Mike works with both Trout Unlimited and the local nonprofit Wilderness in the City, while Becky has been volunteering at the Minnesota Zoo for 25 years. Protecting the environment is at the root of many of their volunteer efforts.

It all started after Mike was stationed in the Navy in New York City on the very first Earth Day in 1970. "It hung with me forever," he said.

Although Mike majored in psychology at Saint Mary's, he believes his true calling may have been forestry because of his love for the outdoors.

This passion for the environment is what spurred the Stinsons to generously donate to an environmental biology lab located in the Adducci Science Center. Saint Mary's is currently raising funds to revitalize and reconfigure the former science building on the Winona Campus into a technologically advanced hub of science, business, and psychology, as well as entrepreneurship — and the support of alumni like the Stinsons is helping to bring this vision to reality.

Mike, a native Nebraskan, attended Saint Mary's during the late 1960s, which were a tumultuous time in American history with the Vietnam War and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. But the De La Salle Christian Brothers made these important pieces of history a part of their curriculum. Brother K. Basil had Mike and his classmates read "Black Like Me" by John Howard Griffin. Another Brother assigned the reading, "Man's Search for Meaning" by Viktor Frankl. A third reading by Gordon Allport, "The Nature of Prejudice," tops Mike's list of significant academic readings.



Mike '69 and Becky Stinson

In addition to being academically challenging, Mike remembers making some very good friends and having a terrific time during his college years.

After graduation, he served as a Navy corpsman and then worked for the blood plasma industry for 25-30 years. From there, he directed blood and plasma products for the American Red Cross headquarters in Washington, D.C., before doing some consulting.

Throughout his career, for more than 20 years, he's given back to his alma mater. And they're excited that their latest gift particularly aligns with their passion for being better stewards of our world.

"I've always been keenly interested in making sure we have clean water," Mike said. "The climate is warming. The eco system is changing. We have got to be really aware of what we're doing. It is absolutely critical to our health as a human species.

"One of the things that has always been dear to me about Saint Mary's is they really talk about ethical leadership," Mike said, adding that the reason for his gift is to perpetuate good leadership. "I hope that these men and women studying environmental biology will learn the issues but also be able to lead and convince others that this is important. Really good leadership is hard. If they can do that, I think that's a terrific legacy."

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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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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2019-2020 Leadership Society Honor Roll

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