



Vocations Day

Priest shortage ignites special event at GACC

With a shortage of priests, a local prayer group felt a need to recognize vocations with a special day.

Guardian Angels Central Catholic hosted a Vocations Day during its Catholic Schools Week. Tina Biteghe Bi Ndong, a member of that prayer group, noted the reason behind the event wasn't complicated.

"What it really comes down to is this; West Point is an amazing place filled with amazing people. When we recognize a problem, in this case a shortage of priests, we rally our family, friends, and neighbors and tackle it," Biteghe Bi Ndong said.

"We are a community of doers and this vocations panel was just another example of 'doing.'"

The members of the vocations panel were: Fr. James Weeder of St. Mary's; Sr. Concepcion of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity (nurse at Franciscan Healthcare); Fr. Scott Schilmoeller, Director of Vocations for the Omaha Archdiocese; and Sr. Melissa Moxley, Formation Directress of the Marian Sisters of the Diocese of Lincoln.

"They each shared their vocation story and then participated in a Q&A at the end. Each story was very different," Biteghe Bi Ndong said.

Sr. Concepcion shared that her family was not very religious. Fr. Weeder had planned to get married and have a family. Fr. Scott shared that he was going down a



Sr. Concepcion at GACC's Vocations Day.

Kralik is first-ever Bluejay at State XC

A surreal season for Guardian Angels Central Catholic senior Kolton Kralik had a surreal finish at the Class D boys state cross country meet Friday (October 21) at Kearney.

Kralik finished 48th out of 128 runners. His time was 18:34.

"I reminded him that no matter what happened on Friday, his legacy would always be his contribution to envisioning and aiding the start of this program," GACC head coach Novia Kaup said. "And of course, the best part of the day was that he finished smiling."

This marked the first year GACC has had a cross country program, which made for an historic event as Kralik was the program's first-ever state qualifier.

"It was a surreal experience. He was incredibly instrumental in establishing the program at GACC. It was such a fitting end to his quest," Kaup said.

Closing out his season in Kearney made plenty of memories for Kralik.

"Running at the state course was a very gratifying experience. The best part of the trip was the memories made with my teammates," Kralik said.



Bluejay senior Kolton Kralik competes at the Class D boys state meet in Kearney.

VOCATIONS DAY: A focus on religious vocations

FROM PAGE 1

rough path prior to his decision to go to the seminary.

Sr. Melissa was the only one that seemed to know early in life that she might consider a religious vocation.

"We hope this was impactful, and we hope that it planted a seed in someone's heart," Biteghe Bi Ndong said.

"There are so many vocations

that a person can be called to. If, at some point, one of them feels a pulling in their heart that they might consider exploring that feeling."

One driving force behind the Vocations Day was to shed a light on those who answered the call of a religious vocation.

That being said, it was noted this event served as an opportunity for students to get to know members of the panel personally.

"We wanted our students to know that they grew up just like us, and they each had their own path to their vocation; all very different," said Wendy Ridder, a member of the prayer group that helped organize the event.

Biteghe Bi Ndong expressed her hope that events like this will spark interest in religious vocations and help the church's challenge of finding priests to serve parishes.

Chris Strehle about two hours prior to his starting time of the Boston Marathon.



Race of a lifetime

Hometown runner finishes Boston Marathon

From Lincoln to Sioux Falls to Boston, it's been an incredible journey for the former college football player, now runner, Chris Strehle of West Point.

The culmination of his seven-year running career came Monday when he crossed the finish line of the prestigious Boston Marathon.

"It's really hard to describe. All that hard work, dedication and sacrifice for all those seven years were all worth it at that moment," Strehle said.

"The hardest part is getting here. Unless you're a professional, it's all about enjoying the experience and finishing."

And that's exactly what Strehle did. He soaked in every second of his rainy 26.2 mile run.

"This is the most incredible experience any runner could have. Both sides of the street were packed. From start to finish, there wasn't a spot on the course where fans weren't cheering for you," Strehle said.

"For me, it wasn't about trying to be famous. I just wanted to finish."

Strehle's journey as a runner began seven years ago when his wife, Melinda, who previously ran a marathon of her own, signed him up for the half marathon in Lincoln on May 1, 2016. That marked his first-ever marathon.

"When my wife signed me up for that, I was not happy with her," Chris said with a laugh. "I didn't even want to run. But that's really where it all started. After that, I was hooked. The rest was history."

Strehle said that after running, the passion for marathons soaked into his blood, and he had his sights set on the Boston Marathon.

Through the injuries endured, and ups and downs of running, it took Strehle three marathon attempts to qualify for Boston.

That qualifying run came in August of 2022 at the Sioux Falls Marathon. Strehle said that some hometown support gave him an extra boost in that race.

West Point native Sidney Swanson plays basketball for the University of Sioux Falls. She and some teammates were there to cheer on Strehle.

"They had a spot at about mile six. They made signs that said, 'Cougars for Strehle.' I got a kick out of that," Strehle said. "That really gave me an extra push."

At Boston, Strehle needed to dig deep and find another 'extra push.' On mile nine, Strehle tweaked the IT band in his knee. Moderate pain turned into severe pain, and his left leg did most of the work as he gutted his way to the finish line.

"If it were any other marathon, I probably wouldn't have run it. But because it was the Boston



Chris Strehle (in the Bluejays shirt) on mile seven of the Boston Marathon in Framingham, Mass.

Fr. Taylor Leffler speaks at Blue Ribbon Dinner

Delores Meister

Father Taylor Leffler's entertaining and inspiring after-dinner speech topped the 39th annual Blue Ribbon Dinner March 26 at the Nielsen Community Center for supporters of Guardian Angels Central Catholic.

Master of ceremonies Devon Birchem (2010) introduced his GACC High School friend Taylor Leffler (2009). He said, "I want to show how my religious vocations progressed living in this community."

His faith began with his parents with bedtime stories and prayers. He told of his preschool Sunday school, kindergarten teacher Mary Brunsing and first grade teacher Sister Clare, then First Holy Communion with Mrs. Jane Knobbe.

"All of my teachers were amazing," he said. "Jean Stieren taught me to play the piano."

He followed the usual Catholic prac-

tices.

But by fifth grade, his heart was moving month by month away from the Lord. Eighth grade and his freshman year were rebellious. His parents were strict with him in high school.

"I was so mad. It was zero alcohol tolerance and a midnight curfew. I couldn't spend the night at friends' houses but rather had to sleep in my own bed every night. And now I am so grateful," he said. "I felt very far away from God. I didn't pray. I was just going to be a good person. I really wasn't happy."

"In my junior year, I woke up. I met kids and adults – Lisa Manley, Lisa Hunke, the Kirwan family, Edge people, who found they had their joy and fulfillment with God's presence in simple things. I started to observe. I started to listen. Things took off after

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BOSTON MARATHON: Strehle runs in prestigious race

FROM PAGE 3

Marathon, as long as I could stay on two feet, and by God's grace, I was going to finish," Strehle said.

Strehle's goal was to run the marathon in less than three hours, five minutes. He was on pace to achieve that goal for the first seven miles, but the injury knocked him off that pace.

Despite the injury, he finished in three hours, 33 minutes, 33 seconds.

On the final stretch when Strehle turned onto Boylston Street, the adrenaline kicked in.

"The Boylston Street is one of the most famous finishes. That last stretch, I held up my arms as much as I could, took off my hat and saluted all the fans," Strehle said.

"There's a mutual respect between the fans and runners. They appreciate you as much as you

appreciate them. The fans, along with your belief, strength and courage, mattered."

While fans fueled Strehle's competitive spirit, another internal motivator was his family. Chris' family wrote their names on his shoes, along with a message.

"One thing my daughter Eleanor wrote is "run through the pain." That kept me going," Strehle said.

"Melinda wrote, "you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you." All of those things motivate you to get through that race. That makes a difference."

Strehle said that it takes years and years of consistent preparation to tackle a moment like this. A person needs self-motivation and accountability.

"Consistent preparation really makes a difference. You have to be consistent. You cannot give up when you have a bump in the

road," Strehle said.

Strehle said the day following the marathon is like one big celebration.

"They highly encourage runners to wear their finishers medal; wear it loud and proud," Strehle said. "The people really embrace this marathon. It's crazy how this city embraces it. It's really neat to be part of."

Now that Strehle has a taste of the Boston Marathon, he wants more.

"I want to come back," he said.

It took years and years of hard work to make Boston a reality, and that same drive is what Strehle will strive for in years to come.

"I could write a book about this seven-year journey. The Boston Marathon experience was incredible. It's a great feeling when all of your hard work pays off," Strehle said. "God gave me a gift; I didn't want to waste my gift."



Gold-medal three-peat

GACC senior Greta Wooldrik delivers rare feat with third state title

Greta Wooldrik etched her name into the history book as one of the all-time greats in high school speech; not only at Guardian Angels Central Catholic, but in the state of Nebraska.

The Bluejay senior did so by capturing her third consecutive championship gold medal at the Class C2 NSAA State Speech meet March 16 in Kearney.

Wooldrik pulled off the three-peat in an event she has dominated throughout her high school career, Entertainment.

“I just feel very blessed to have this opportunity. I’m still a little bit in shock about it,” Wooldrik said.

“It’s almost an overwhelming feeling. After I won the first time, I never expected more [titles]. I just knew I had to work hard to get where I wanted.”

And hard work is exactly what

Wooldrik did throughout her career.

“Hundreds of hours have gone into these three golds, and she deserves each and every medal,” GACC coach Kylie Kai said. “It was a perfect ending to her speech career.”

While it took plenty of hard work to perfect a speech, Wooldrik’s personality and natural ability to talk allowed her to shine.

With the type of person Wooldrik is, Entertainment was right up her alley.

“I always wanted to do something that I could write myself,” Wooldrik said. “I just want to make people laugh and smile. That’s a huge thing for me. I always enjoy being able to do that.”

With speech being so subjective, being a two-time champ is rare. And while it has happened before

(at least once), winning three consecutive state titles is an extremely rare accomplishment.

“I just feel really blessed. It’s just a relief when all your hard work pays off. It’s just an amazing, amazing feeling,” Wooldrik said.

“I just want to give a lot of praise to my coaches. They took me in on day one, and made me the speaker I am today. They played a huge role in my career. This medal belongs to them as much as it does to me.”

This year’s Bluejay coaches were Kylie Kai, Devon Bircham and Morgyn Christiansen.

“I also need to thank my parents [Mark and Michelle] for all their support over the years. I couldn’t have done this without them,” Wooldrik added.

Wooldrik’s speech this year was

A season to be proud of

Some hardware highlighted Guardian Angels Central Catholic's trip to the Class C2 NSAA State Speech meet March 16 at Kearney.

GACC senior Greta Wooldrik captured her third consecutive state title. Once again, Wooldrik produced a gold-medal finish in Entertainment.

Bluejay junior Isabel Hass also brought home some hardware. She finished 3rd in Serious Prose.

Senior Erin Jensen competed in Humorous, junior Sydney Hutchinson presented her Persuasive, and sophomore Mackenzie Schmid gave her state speech in Poetry.

While that group of Bluejay speakers did reach finals, GACC coach Kylie Kai was proud of their efforts at state.

"All five of our state competitors should be very proud," Kai said. "Although the results for some may have been disappointing, they all deserve the praise and recognition that comes with making it to state."

Kai added that this was certainly a season to remember.



Above: GACC junior Isabel Hass captured a 3rd-place medal in Serious Prose.

Top Left: Erin Jensen, left, and Mackenzie Schmid were state qualifiers.

Left: Sydney Hutchinson was also a state speaker.

GRETA WOOLDRIK: GACC senior wins third state title

FROM PAGE 5

"Dependency;" dependency on her phone, her parents and winning people over.

"I knew Greta had it in her to pull off a third gold medal, but we had some tough competition in C2, so we went in with an open mind. I told her the pressure was off, and one gold medal is a huge accomplishment, let alone two or three," Kai said.

"We didn't know the results of the final entertainment round before it was announced, so I was just as surprised and excited as everyone else; tears of joy."

While Wooldrik ends her speech

career as a three-time state champ, it was a journey that almost never happened.

"I don't think I would have done it had I not torn my ACL my freshman year of basketball," Wooldrik said.

After the sports injury, Greta's dad told her to do speech.

"I remember laughing at him saying, 'no way,' but he pushed me into it. He said, 'You talk too much the way it is. You're doing speech.'

"God definitely played a factor in that for me too. He guided me to my true talents. So I give a lot of credit to Him for my success."

The only time Wooldrik didn't

win a state title was her freshman year when there was no state meet.

Wooldrik had won the conference speech meet that year, but districts and state were canceled due to COVID.

"That year was a bummer," Wooldrik noted.

Wooldrik closed by saying, "I just want to thank the speech community. It is so amazing, and everyone is so kind.

"I have to give a lot of props to everyone who does speech. The life lessons I've learned in speech will forever play a role in my life. Speech can be terrifying and challenging, so I praise anyone who does it."



GACC girls take 3rd in Class C2

Above: Members of the Class C2 Girls State Basketball team for GACC (3rd place) are, from left, front: Isabel Hass, Reese Throener, Brynn Baumert, Leah Jansen, Jocelynn Skoda; back: Ava Nixon, Abi Toline, Adyson Luebert, Kennedy Baumert, Izzy Kreikemeier, Kate Jansen, Charlie Dinslage and Kelsy Steffen. The Bluejays were coached by Jerry Stracke, Kevin Kreikemeier, Kelly Dinslage and Lexis Utemark.



Trivia Night fun at GACC

Delores Meister

Trivia Night in its fourth year had 38 teams of eight players each. Competition was two-fold: teams compete for best costumes and most points for correct answers.

Costume winners were the Flinstones: Pam & Tyson Dinslage, Pat & Jenna Knievel, Seth & Beth Bose, and Derek & Melanie Aschoff.

In four years, this team placed first the first year, second in the second and third, and again returned to first place this year.

As usually expected, the teachers' answered the most trivia questions correctly to win the overall contest.



Cornhole Tournament

Delores Meister

Fellowship and fun were goals in the Cornhole Tournament fundraiser at the GA Gym. Fifty-six two member teams competed in tossing bean bags through cornhole boards for cash prizes.

Dr. Tyson Dinslage chaired this popular St. Mary's Parish Council sponsored fundraiser. The competition began four years ago with two member teams registered at \$50 a team.

Space will limit future cornhole events to 56 teams.

Spectators are welcome with free admission to watch the tournament and cheer on their favorite team. Food was available with a free will offering.

Funds were given to St. Mary's Parish.

BLUE RIBBON DINNER:

FROM PAGE 4

that.”

As a senior, Lifeteen gave important messages. It broke down to looking forward to learning more about what happened today in the thoughts and lives of the happy people around him.

He met the vocations director and seminar-ians; more new friends. An aptitude test showed

Leffler was a people person with an aptitude for serving people.

“God found me and invited me,” Leffler said.

Leffler's prayer became, “Lord, if you know and you have a plan for me, show me the plan.”

A year of college at UNO, attending Focus, “my faith skyrocketed.” His entrance to the seminary followed.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Attention: Alumni Banquet will be held June 10, 2023

Honor classes: 1923, 1928, 1933, 1938, 1943, 1948, 1953, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1973, 1983, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2013, 2023

Note: JayFest will be held June 9, 2023



BIRTHS

Karmen (Emanuel) '08 & Andy Dickes, son, Logan Donald, DOB 9/18/22

Melissa (Franzluebbers) '09 & Jason Goltz, daughter, Vaeda Mae, DOB 11/20/22

Emily (Ridder) '09 & Ryan Mascariello, son, Louie Michael, DOB 11/24/22

Kelsey (Knobbe) '10 & Brock Schroder, son, Ford Richard, DOB 11/29/22

Devon '10 & Kelsey Bircherm, son, Baker Charles, DOB 11/29/22

Jacob M '11 & Sarah Rolf, daughter, Madeline Mae, DOB 1/16/23

Maddie (Knobbe) '17 & Sage Gideon, son, Mack Melvin, DOB 1/21/23

Gary '07 & Sarah Franzluebbers, son, Calvin John, DOB 1/25/23

Dalton '12 & Kimberly Graybeal, daughter, Matilda Lou, DOB 2/4/23

Allyn '06 & Heather Knobbe, son, Ledger Allyn, DOB 2/16/23

Madison (Kreikemeier) '14 & Blake Ristine, son, Hank Kennenth, DOB 2/27/23

Mikayla (Klitz) '05 & Jess Gaver, son Hunter Michael, DOB 3/1/23

Matt '00 & Erin Ridder, daughter, Emma Terese, DOB 4/5/23

WEDDINGS

Brandon Meister '15 married Lexi Ostrand on 11/19/22

Megan Perry '11 married Jackson Buck on 12/3/22

Caitlyn Guenther '09 married Cody Eiler on 2/18/23

Morgan Bracht '16 married Tyler Weitzenkamp on 3/18/23

Kali Stratman '18 married Dalton Smith on 4/15/23

Emails Wanted:

Please send your current email address to ranaeobrien1@gmail.com to receive our online edition of "News from the Nest" throughout the year.

Class of 2023

GACC seniors, parents

Brynn Baumert: daughter of Corey '97 & Kara Baumert

Tori Buss: daughter of Roger & Paula Buss

Michael Cohee: son of Thomas & Michelle Cohee

Tanner Ehrisman: son of Mitchell & Danelle Ehrisman

Tara Gentrup: daughter of Tina Gentrup '89 & Terry Gentrup '82

Logan Grimm: daughter of Jason & Lea '96 Grimm

Andie Guenther: daughter of Jeff '85 & Nancy Guenther

Paige Hakel: daughter of Dan & Jill Hakel

Ryan Hrbek: son of Doug & Ann Hrbek

Hailey Hunzeker: daughter of Josh & Alice Hunzeker

Leah Jansen: daughter of Matt & Tarah Jansen

Erin Jensen: daughter of Scott Jensen and Julie Jensen and niece of Darrin and Krisa Brown

Carsten Knobbe: son of Doug '96 & Blayne Knobbe

Kolton Kralik: son of Shawn & Anne Kralik

Halle Kreikemeier: daughter

of Keith & Jennifer '94 Kreikemeier

Bridget Meier: daughter of Matt & Joani Meier

Emma Meiergerd: daughter of Ralph '82 & Mindy Meiergerd

Bo Oligmueller: son of Brian '85 & Tanya Oligmueller

Blake Ortmeier: son of Troy '86 & Kristy '97 Ortmeier

Cassandra Peatrowsky: daughter of Alan '95 & Paula Peatrowsky

Sadie Rahn: daughter of Karey & Joy '92 Rahn

Jack Ritter: son of Jeremy & Laura '99 Ritter

James Rolf: son of Brian '80 & Jeannette Rolf

Zoey Ruskamp: daughter of the late Ron and Gina Ruskamp

Trey Smith: son of Jason & Danelle '97 Smith

Carter Stratman: son of Doug '84 & Joy Stratman

Reese Throener: daughter of Doug & Karla Throener

Greta Wooldrik: daughter of Mark & Michelle '88 Wooldrik

Guardian Angels Central Catholic's graduation ceremony is Sunday, May 14 at 1 p.m.

DEATHS

ETERNAL REST GRANT UNTO THEM O LORD

Mary Lou McLaughlin '61: Date of death 12/5/22

James Heilmann '77: Date of death 12/7/22

Thomas Lux '52: Date of death 1/1/23

Theresa (Reichlinger) Stecher '57: Date of death 1/4/23

Doris (Sendgraff) Batenhorst '50: Date of death 2/9/23

Francis Stalp '47: Date of death

2/16/23

Paul Stalp '47: Date of death 3/6/23

Elaine (Aschoff) Throener '62: Date of death 3/11/23

Robert Stieren '67: Date of death 3/14/23

Robert Prinz '58: Date of death 3/15/23

Nicholas Wieler '41: Date of death 4/7/23

Willard Harstick '50: Date of death 4/12/23

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