

Leadership in Service

MARY SUE ANTER TANIS

“Magnificat has a way of convincing a young woman that she has a big piece of God inside her, and she walks out into the world thinking she can do anything,” says Mary Sue Anter Tanis '72, founder and executive director of Youth Challenge. **“It gives them that fire in the belly,”** she adds.



Mary Sue Anter Tanis '72 with Magificat student and Youth Challenge volunteer Shannon Visconti '11.

That faith, confidence and “fire in the belly” must have been what guided Mary Sue when, at the age of 22, she started an alternative summer recreation program for children with physical disabilities.

The year was 1976, and Mary Sue had recently graduated from the University of Colorado, Boulder with a degree in therapeutic recreation, with an emphasis on recreation for the physically handicapped. The Fairview Park resident was spending her winters in Vermont teaching children and adults with disabilities how to ski, but she wanted to do more when she came home for the summer.

“I came home and wanted to work with children outside. I called Fairview Park recreation and they said you can do it, you can use our fields, but there’s no money,” says Mary Sue.

Her all-volunteer entity, called “The Fairview Special” back then, gave children with physical limitations the opportunity to do everything from swimming to playing duck, duck, goose to bowling. As the program grew beyond just summers, Mary Sue worked with the children in the evenings, working full time during the day as the center director for the Golden Age Centers of Cleveland. She also served as assistant director of Camp Cheerful.

Youth Challenge officially incorporated as a privately funded 501 c(3) non-profit corporation on January 23, 1983. The dream that Mary Sue had in 1976, today services 140 physically-disabled children, ages 4-18 in a five-county area. Youth Challenge offers year-round adapted sports and recreational programs to children with muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy and hearing or sight impairments.

Participants are paired up with a teenage volunteer who is trained to work and play with a child with a physical disability. Over 180 programs are offered each year, including basketball, baseball, swimming and tennis.

“Anything a Magnificat girl would do on a Saturday, they do,” says Mary Sue. “From rock climbing to kayaking to skiing. We are creating opportunities for them disguised as sports and recreational activities to learn life skills.”

Over 350 Youth Challenge volunteers, most of them teens, ages 12 and up, enrich the lives of these special children. Mary Sue is grateful for all her volunteers, past and present, but especially proud of the hundreds of volunteers that have come from Magnificat. This year alone, Magnificat has about 40 volunteers working at the Westlake-based organization. And in fact, it’s these student volunteers that Mary Sue says are so inspiring.

“It all started with the Magnificat Key Club providing volunteers, and now some of them are in there 30s and 40s,” explains Mary Sue. “Having these young women come back and visit or send me a Christmas card is so rewarding. They did something with their lives that was bigger than them. I get to see how the seeds Youth Challenge planted in these girls at a young age have sprouted.”

Two former volunteers have come back to work with Mary Sue—Sarah Perez-Stable '01, volunteer and program coordinator, and Lisa McCafferty Friel '96, outreach coordinator. Current volunteer standout is Shannon Visconti '11, who serves on the Youth Challenge board of trustees, and who has already logged about 500 volunteer hours.

“The gift that Magnificat gave me was Latin and faith. Latin helped me with the written word and proofing. And faith helps you accept differences,” says Mary Sue.

If you’d like to find out more about Youth Challenge, you can e-mail Mary Sue at mstanis@youthchallengesports.com.

ANNA TOMKO

Anna Tomko '82 speaks English once a week, and that's during a 20-minute phone call home to her mom. Anna lives in Belgium, sent there as a lay missionary through a program called Auxiliary Missionaries of the Assumption, run by the Sisters of the Assumption. It was through this group that she was assigned to minister at a L'Arche community in Bierges, Belgium in 1987.

L'Arche is an international network of faith-based communities centered on adults with light to moderate learning disabilities. It was founded in 1964 by Jean Vanier, the son of Canadian Governor General Georges Vanier, when he welcomed two men with disabilities into his home in France.

The name "L'Arche" is French for "The Ark," referring to Noah's Ark. It's a worldwide organization welcoming people from different faiths, intellectual capacity, social origin and cultures. People with developmental disabilities and those who assist them—such as Anna—live and work together to create homes. Today, there are 130 L'Arche communities in 36 countries.

Anna first heard about Vanier and L'Arche at Magnificat in a theology class book. She didn't plan on working with people with disabilities, or core members, as they are

called in L'Arche, but she did grow up with a brother with a hearing loss. She says that taught her patience and the use of non-verbal language. She did, however, want to complete at least one year of service in a foreign country.

She describes her responsibility within L'Arche as "making home." Morning or evening duty might include helping her housemates with readying for work, chores, preparing supper, attending their sports club, doctor visits, going to the movies, preparing medication and calming crises.

"I create a space where those with disabilities with whom I live can grow to their potential as human beings," says Anna.

When asked about the memorable experiences Anna has had with L'Arche, she mentions two. The first is the sports club they founded 20 years ago that allows adults with disabilities to gather weekly for athletics, including participation in the Belgian Special Olympics. The second project involves offering the core members in her community opportunities for retreats, social outings and fellowship.

Anna attributes many of the talents and skills she uses today to her time at Magnificat, from curriculum classes to extra-curricular activities.



Anna Tomko '82, left, with a member of the L'Arche community she assisted in Belgium.

"The U.N. Club gave me the opportunity to explore and be open to other cultures—their similarities and their differences. This has been very useful in an international organization with so many different cultures and religions," says Anna. **"Being on a work program at Magnificat also helped to develop a sense of the value of education and the importance of working toward a goal, even through small contributions."**

If you'd like to contact Anna, you can e-mail her at annatomko@hotmail.com.

Editor's Note: At the time of this article, Anna was leaving Belgium to join a L'Arche community in the U.S.

ANNIE CAHILL KELLY



Annie Cahill Kelly

Indiana community, connecting faculty and students

Annie Cahill Kelly '89 intended to use her math degree from the University of Notre Dame to teach high school. But when she returned from a two-year service project in Santiago, Chile, Annie knew service was her true calling.

Annie is the director of community partnerships and service learning at the Center for Social Concerns of the University of Notre Dame, an organization she worked at as an undergraduate. Today, she serves as a liaison to the local South Bend,

with local organizations through their community-based learning and service courses.

The Center for Social Concerns strives to embody the University of Notre Dame's effort "to create a sense of human solidarity and concern for the common good that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice," according to the school's mission statement. Annie's goal is to make sure students are placed in relevant ways that relate directly to what they are studying in their service-learning courses.

"I honestly never considered this to be a career path while I was in college," says Annie. The additional major of theology while in college was more out of personal interest and to develop my own faith and understanding."

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The former Westlake resident got her first taste of service work during her senior Genesis project at Magnificat. From there she worked at the Center for Social Concern, completed an urban plunge in the inner-city of Cleveland and worked at a homeless shelter in San Diego—all before she even graduated from Notre Dame.

“The Genesis project my senior year at Magnificat was a significant experience. Working at Head Start with Julie Butler for my project was my first real immersion into service.”

But it was her two years abroad in Chile after college graduation that really shaped her career path. She taught English in a Chilean girls’ high school through Alliance for Catholic Education, then spent the rest of her time there with the Holy Cross Associates working with a Chilean parish and orphanage.

After Chile, Annie started her first real paying job at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. She was hired as the associate director of the Creighton Center for Service and Justice, an organization similar to her current Center for Social Concerns, but with a smaller staff and scope. Annie realized she could play a similar role for other young people looking to pursue paths of service, just as she had felt while at Notre Dame. Her three-year stint at Creighton led her to her current post, returning to the same school she graduated from in 1993.

Annie also teaches a one-credit seminar at Notre Dame, preparing students who will be studying abroad in Chile. In the past few years, Annie has had Magnificat graduates in her class.

“It’s been great to work with Notre Dame students who are alumnae of Magnificat. says Annie. “It’s nice to keep that connection alive and well.”

“I received a wonderful education at Magnificat, and it built on the strong foundation laid by my parents and family to prepare me so very well for college. I believe both my family and Magnificat prepared me not only academically, but also in a life-scene to know that there was more to college than just studying,” says Annie. To be a well-rounded person I need to engage with members of our society who experienced injustice day in and day out. I am grateful to Magnificat and my teachers there who prepared me well for a rigorous curriculum at Notre Dame and beyond.”

You can drop Annie a line by e-mailing her at cahillkelly.1@nd.edu.

HIGHLIGHTS

BLUESTREAKS through RIVER

ANNUAL 5K RACE

Lace up your tennis shoes for the 11th Annual Blue Streaks through River 5K Walk/Run on Sunday, May 30. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. with an 8:00 a.m. start time. Pre-registration is \$14 for adults, \$10 for children. Visit www.hermescleveland.com to register or for more information.



Race is in memory of Dr. Regis Leonard, with a portion of the proceeds benefitting the newly established Dr. Regis Leonard Endowed Scholarship.

SPRING PLAY ANNOUNCED

The Magnificat Performing Arts Department presents the comedy *Ladies of the Jury* April 23-25. In a small town, a jury is selected and a murder trial is held, but the dramatic proceedings are amusingly interrupted by an eccentric juror named Mrs. Crane. She uses unorthodox means to change the minds of the other jurors. Written by Fred Ballard, the production has had much success on Broadway and has starred many distinguished actresses. Show times are 7:30 p.m., with a Sunday matinee at 4:00 p.m. For ticket information, log on to www.ticketspigot.com or call (440) 331-1572, ext. 277.

MAGNIFICAT FACULTY MEMBER RECOGNIZED— SISTER HELEN JEAN: MYTHBUSTER

Our very own Sister Helen Jean, VP of Mission, was asked to become a MythBuster for the Benjamin Rose Institute, a leader in service, research and advocacy for the elderly in Northeast Ohio. The Benjamin Rose MythBuster program spotlights individuals who are outstanding examples of contributing seniors in the Greater Cleveland community. Sister Helen Jean is featured in the MythBuster 2010 calendar for the month of November, and in various print and radio advertisements. We congratulate Sister Helen Jean, our very own MythBuster!

MythBuster Sister Helen Jean, along with Tess Kilbane Myers '11 and Alex Ruda '10, left to right. Photo courtesy of Steve Zorc, Zorc Photography.

