

Beyond the Bell: Service-minded students keep Mount St. Joseph on the ball

By Erik Zygmunt

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"It's easy to recognize the star pupil, the No. 1 student in the class, the star quarterback or shortstop," said David Norton, principal of Mount St. Joseph High School.

The all-boys school in Irvington, however, reserves a special esteem for the service-minded students who make the crowd-pleasing feats possible.

"Service is something our school is about," Norton said. "They're giving their time and energy and want to be a part of something."

Senior Joey Chambers doesn't see himself as forgoing anything.

"I like to be busy," he said.

Chambers has managed and assisted several athletic teams over his four years at Mount St. Joseph, but has a special fondness for basketball, especially close games against Baltimore Catholic League rival St. Frances Academy.

"When we host St. Frances, everyone's all decked out," he said, "everyone has a role."

Chambers found his role early on.

"I figured out a while ago that I couldn't play," he said. "I figured I could help out."

He may be making a career of it. Pat Clatchey, the Gaels' basketball coach, has already reached out on Chambers' behalf to the staff at Mount St. Mary's University, where Chambers will study in the fall.

"I'm excited to be one of the managers next year for the Mountaineers," he said.

While Mount St. Mary's offers a major in sport management, Chambers is thinking business, which, he said, "can open more opportunities."

Also envisioning himself as a decision-maker for a professional sports franchise, fellow senior Tom Hoffmeister has also found managing sports - particularly baseball - to be his sweet spot.

He is an Eagle Scout and black belt in karate, but Hoffmeister said he was "never good" at baseball.

A self-described "shy kid," he is now part of the team. "

Junior Russ Sullivan reads at school liturgies and assists Father Michael Murphy, school chaplain. Whether he enters finance or the priesthood, he is sure of one thing.

"Whoever God wants me to be," he said, "I'm willing to accept it."

Ask Sullivan a banal question Why do you enjoy reading at Mass? - and the answer is anything but.

"It just fascinates me that you're reading the inspired word of God to a congregation," he said. "I'm in awe of that sometimes."

An altar boy since fifth grade at St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park, Sullivan "stepped into more of a leadership role" as a sacristan a few years later, which informed his service at Mount St. Joseph.

Sullivan said his service gives him a "sneak peek" of the priesthood.

While senior Matt Sekira isn't planning a career related to his school service, he's nonetheless in high demand as the resident audio visual expert.

"It's a service to me, personally," Norton said. "If I'm talking to some parents, I don't have to worry about this working or that working."

Sekira's interest in what he calls "just a hobby" began his sophomore year, when he ran the spotlight for the spring musical. As older students taught him "from the ground up" to run the sound board and program the lights, his participation grew.

He enjoys the responsibility, and being behind the spotlight as opposed to in it suits him.

"I'm not someone who likes so much focus on me," he said.

Norton, who coached Gaels' baseball for 31 seasons, said that the contributions of Sekira, Sullivan, Hoffmeister and Chambers are central to the Mount St. Joseph experience.

"It's learning how to handle people," Norton said, "and how to handle different situations."

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