

Graduation profile: St. Maria Goretti graduate is healthy, happy - and giving back

HAGERSTOWN - Abby Theis departed St. Maria Goretti High School with top grades - and more than 300 hours of service. What's more, she did all that after struggling through her freshman year while undergoing treatment for leukemia.

"I missed 84 days my first year before realizing that I needed time to just get some rest and try again the following year," Theis said of ninth grade. "It wasn't easy receiving chemotherapy while still trying to get As in my classes.

"The experience helped me understand how hard life can be for some people. I want to help as many people as possible and help make their lives a little bit better."

To that end, Theis proposed a toy drive for the Children's National Medical Center, where she was treated. It began last Christmas, but continued throughout the school year. She hopes it will become an ongoing school project.

"I originally wanted it to be a full-year thing," Theis said. "Christmas is a good time to advertise it."

She also led the school's annual fund-raiser for the Light the Night: Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Students paid \$5 for a non-uniform day, bringing in approximately \$1,000. This summer she will make her third mission trip with Goretti to Virginia Beach.

"She is an inspiration to others, having borne her challenges while keeping her head high and putting others first, always with a gentle smile," said campus minister Heather Nees.

All the while, she stayed dedicated to her studies, especially science.

The youngest child of Thomas and Christina Theis, members of St. Mary Parish in

Hagerstown, Abby will study biology and forensics at Loyola University Maryland. She hopes to become a medical examiner.

“She has challenged herself with all honors and AP classes,” said Anne Barton, Theis’s favorite science teacher, who was impressed with more than her academics. “She’s incredibly faith-filled. She’s devoted to giving back in kind for everything that has been given to her.”

Theis received her school’s John H. Munday Memorial Scholarship, which remembers a beloved science teacher.

“Abby truly values service above self and exudes a quiet joy while helping make the world a better place,” said Genie Massey, National Honor Society moderator.