

Mount St. Mary's product: PIE scholarship 'changed my life'

Alexis Watson needed just seven semesters to earn a degree in communication from Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, where last week she began work on her master's in business administration.

The 22-year-old is employed by the Mount as a program coordinator in alumni engagement, and already knows her way around development and marketing, having served as the face of its "Live Significantly" campaign during the previous school year, which put her on radio, TV and billboards.

None of that would have happened, according to Watson, without the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Partners in Excellence (PIE) scholarship program. It allowed her to attend the former Seton Keough High School, which she said made for an easy transition to the Mount.

"This literally changed my life," Watson told Archbishop William E. Lori and a room filled with benefactors during the annual PIE breakfast at the Legg Mason Tower Sept. 6. "There is no way I was going to a Catholic high school without it."

Watson described growing up in Pikesville and thriving in public school, despite being bullied. Her single mom, Elizabeth, worked in an office where the supervisor's daughter was "excelling" at Seton Keough. Before Watson's "shadow day" there was done, she was sold on Catholic schools.

"In a Catholic school, you are never ignored," said Watson, who shared an anecdote involving Kathleen Jauschnegg, one of her teachers at Seton Keough. "I remember my homeroom teacher scolding me for not wearing a hat and gloves on a cold day. Where does that happen?"

PIE's investment in her aptitude and work ethic forecast her earning a presidential scholarship and the Agnes Cogan Waterman Memorial Scholarship to the Mount. Her college internships included Maryland Public Television; the Northeast Conference, which includes the Mount's athletic teams; and the university's athletic

department.

Watson made history as the youngest member of the President's Council at Mount St. Mary's, a position she had to give up once she became an employee of the university.

"I also met my fiancé there," Watson said, pointing to Josh Poole, an assistant track and field coach at the Mount and fellow MBA candidate. They are to be married in September 2019.

The PIE program was launched in 1996. Through the 2017-18 school year, it had awarded more than \$31 million in Catholic school scholarships to approximately 26,500 children from low-income families.

Some of its benefactors go beyond monetary donations, as the Partners in Excellence Award went to Constellation, which every other Wednesday sends 25 of its employees to Cardinal Shehan School, where they mentor 80 boys and girls in the seventh and eighth grades.

"Some weeks," said Janaé Lawson, an executive administration coordinator for Constellation, "I don't know who's getting more out of it, me or them."

Less than a year after it became an online sensation, the choir from Cardinal Shehan School, under the direction of Kenyatta Hardison, returned to offer the Prayer of St. Francis and its rendition of "I've Got Peace Like a River."

In addition to Cardinal Shehan, the PIE program focuses its support on Archbishop Borders School, Holy Angels Catholic School and Ss. James and John Catholic School. Also in attendance were PIE scholarship recipients from Archbishop Curley High School.

Jon von Paris, chairman of PIE's Board of Advisors, served as master of ceremonies. The breakfast was sponsored by Gaudreau Inc.

Email Paul McMullen at pmcmullen@CatholicReview.org