



ST. NORBERT CATHOLIC SCHOOL

ALUMNI NEWS

VOL. 5 Issue 1

instagram: SNCShawks • saintnorbertschool.org/alumni

June 2026



Hannah Pearson flies over the Belmont Shore area of Long Beach as she works toward her private pilot license in 2024.

HIGH in the SKY

Hannah Pearson (2018) zeroed in on a career as a pilot after she went for a discovery flight with her dad a couple of years ago.

"We first went in a plane then a helicopter and after that flight I knew I had to enroll in a flight school," says Hannah, 22.

After graduating from Foothill High School, Hannah attended Orange Coast College for a few semesters while working to save money and figuring out her path. Eventually she left OCC and continued working full time while going to HeliStream helicopter flight school in Costa

Mesa part time to earn her private pilot license. Once she became a private pilot she enrolled in Mauna Loa Helicopters training school in Kona, Hawai'i.

"The main reason for picking Hawai'i was the school," Hannah says. "It offered me an environment that helped me fully immerse myself in this field, provided me with many peers all working toward similar goals, and the big one, worked with federal student loans."

Hannah says living in Hawai'i has

see HANNAH, page 7

ALUMNI in the NEWS

1970s

Greg Wilfahrt (1974) graduated from Servite before earning a bachelor's degree at San Diego State University and is currently the chief marketing officer for AP Technology based in Carlsbad, a company that offers payment issuance solutions for banks, insurance companies, law firms, government offices and businesses.

CSU Northridge graduate **Peggy Duquesnal Malbon** (1974) is an accomplished pianist, vocalist, composer and educator with more than 30 years of professional experience based in Signal Hill. She has released 16 albums that have received critical acclaim in the jazz, pop and inspirational markets, and has performed and recorded with such notables as Henry Mancini, Pat Boone and Dionne Warwick. She also served as keyboardist for the Anaheim Angels and Anaheim Ducks.

2010s

A few years working in the business world was enough to convince **Mateo Murgia** (2012) he was in the wrong profession. So he returned to university and earned a master's degree in education. This month Mateo completed his first year teaching sixth grade at St. Norbert Catholic School.

Kate (Wilson) Gaarenstroom (2012), a graduate of Rosary Academy and Loyola Marymount University, is the board liaison and executive assistant for Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County.



Alumni parents in attendance included (from left) Sherri Terrones, Mikki Hansen, Gigi Oskorus, Matt Terrones, Paty Jimenez, Angel Jimenez, Gary McKimmey, Patty McKimmey, Steve Farley, Maggie Mora, Maureen Fetter, Julie Panganiban, Maynard Panganiban and (in front) class of 2013 alumna Emma Pearson and mom Sharon.

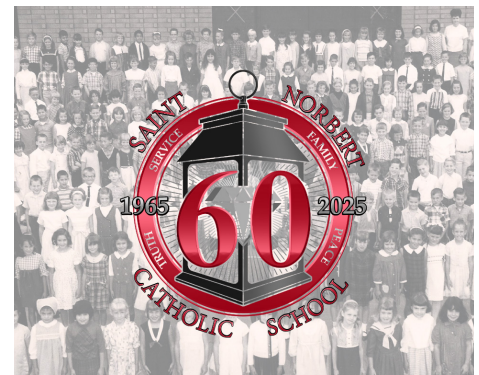
Welcome HOME

More than 250 turned out for St. Norbert Catholic School's 60th anniversary Denim & Diamonds celebration last November.

The night, festively celebrated on the campus, raised money for the school and honored the service of those who have supported the school over the years.

Those recognized included the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the religious order who founded the school in 1965 and staffed it for half of its tenure. In attendance were Sr. Catherine Burke, one of the founding Sisters of the Presentation; former principal Sr. Kathleen Pritchard; former teacher Sr. Rosemary O'Sullivan; former teacher Niamh Kelly; Sr. Mary Dunlea; Sr. Angela Callanan; and Sr. Debbie Gumina. The school also honored two longtime teachers, Sally Debevec and Connie Thomas.

The school doesn't currently have any sisters on the teaching staff, but the charism of the Presentation Sis-



ters is still incorporated and taught.

Attendees caught up, enjoyed hors d'oeuvres, snapped pictures in a photo booth, checked out tables set up with 60 years of school pictures and trophies and bid on silent auction items, including baskets of cooking supplies, wine bottles, cookies and milk with a teacher, Star Wars lightsabers and a vacation in Italy.

St. Norbert raised just short of its \$30,000 goal to fund new Chromebooks for the younger students, new Chromebook carts and upgrade the gym's sound system.

CHECK OUT MORE EVENT PHOTOS, PAGE 5.

EVENTS & AROUND CAMPUS

Smash, Spin & Win at Pickleball Tournament

We invite you to join the St. Norbert Catholic School inaugural Pickleball Tournament Saturday, June 20. Whether you are a seasoned player or just starting to master the sport, this is a wonderful opportunity to have fun and support our school. We hope you will consider participating in our pickleball tournament in any of the following ways:

- 1) Become a Sponsor:** To become a sponsor for this year's event, please contact Denise Hilliard at events@saintnorbertschool.org.
- 2) Register to Play:** You may register as a single or with a partner online at sncs.betterworld.org/events/sncs-pickleball-tournament. You may also purchase spectator tickets.
- 3) Donate to our Raffle:** We look forward to raffling off terrific prizes at the tournament, like professional services, products, sporting event tickets and concert tickets. Proceeds will benefit the Legacy of Light Fund, which is dedicated to capital improvements and ongoing maintenance of our school's facilities. Your participation will have a lasting positive impact on the SNCS community. Thank you for your consideration!

Music Education Garners Accolades

For the fourth year in a row, St. Norbert Catholic School has been honored as a NAMM "2025 Best Communities for Music Education" school! NAMM first recognized our longstanding dedication to music education under Mrs. Miraflor (2022), then continued the distinction with our shift to Music Universe for our music education, which provides the following for our students:

- Introduction of a full music curriculum
- Music theory as well as practice, currently with desk bells, and moving into other forms
- A continued choir and rehearsal

schedule for all school performances

We are proud of our dedication to enhancing our students' lives and their academics with music education, and we are grateful to NAMM for recognizing us with this prestigious award.

Summertime Volunteers Needed

Alumna **Michelle (Ortiz) Navarro** (1990) is heading up St. Norbert Church's Christian Service food distribution and is looking for volunteers 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. Join alumni, current families and parishioners as they assemble bags of food for more than 400 families each week behind the St. Norbert Family & Youth Center. To sign up, email christianservice@stnorbertchurch.org or click on the QR code above.



Invest in the Future of SNCS

Honor a loved one who valued Catholic education by donating a monetary gift or non-cash financial instruments, such as stocks or mutual funds, to St. Norbert Catholic School. Our needs include:

- **SNCS Endowment Fund:** Provides financial support now and into the future. Funds are used to reduce or stabilize the school's deficit.
- **Tuition Assistance Fund:** Gifts of any amount help families struggling to meet their child(ren)'s tuition costs (about \$8,850/year).
- **Legacy of Light:** Contributions help finance projects that improve the school's safety, durability and energy efficiency.
- **Kathy Oldham Children's Fund:** Supports our school in a way that honors our dear friend Kathy Oldham and her love of family, children, faith and art education.

To arrange a donation, please call (714) 637-6822 or email info@saintnorbertschool.org.

Rosary Academy and University of San Diego graduate **Ava Cunningham** (2015) is a sales development specialist with Essity, a global hygiene and health company.

After graduating from California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt with a bachelor's degree, **Matthew Salmassian** (2016) is now a forester with the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District.

California Baptist University graduate **Victoria Batta** (2017) is working as a medical assistant for Advanced California Dermatology and an emergency medical technician for CHOC and Lynch Ambulance.

2020s

John Paul the Great Catholic University freshman **Ben Ciccoianni** (2021) wrote, directed and filmed One More Take (available on YouTube) and won Audience Choice and Best Narrative at the Vista Strawberry Film Festival.

Anthony Traquena (2022) was named Class of 2026 valedictorian at Mater Dei High School. Anthony was also recognized for his musical accomplishments as an Honors Chamber Singer and the school's PR Media Chair.

Mater Dei graduate **Braylan Padilla** (2022) has been awarded a full-ride baseball scholarship to UCLA.

Do you have news to share? We'd love to hear! Email your Alumni Update to alumni@saintnorbertschool.org.



Yvonne Verkuylen: teacher, decathlon coach

While Yvonne Verkuylen only taught kindergarten at St. Norbert School for five years, she substituted, volunteered and long-term subbed for more than 20 years. Her presence at St. Norbert was always felt - in Academic Decathlon, Talent Show, Computer/Tech classes, Masters of the Arts, and so much more. She raised her hand for everything St. Norbert might need—quietly, humbly, without needing recognition.

After a brave battle with cancer, Mrs. Verkuylen passed away on Feb. 4, 2026 at her home in Villa Park at the age of 63.

She was born Sept. 28, 1962 to Teofilo Pagaduan and Remedios Lamadrid in Baguio City, Philippines. After graduating from the University of California, Irvine with degrees in biology and sociology, Mrs. Verkuylen earned her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential from California State University, Long Beach.

She married Albert Verkuylen in 1990, and together they shared 35 years of unconditional love, unwavering support and the joyful chaos of a life truly lived.

Mrs. Verkuylen didn't just teach kindergarten, says daughter Paula Vrzic, she fiercely protected it as the most critical education launchpad of a child's life.

"To her, grade school wasn't babysit-



ting or playtime - it was the definitive first step of an academic career," says Paula. "It is the exact moment where a child learns structure, sets their academic tone, and - most importantly - discovers a lifelong love of learning. She knew that having a teacher who actively cares, wants to impact young minds and ensures every child gets the specific type of attention and tailored teaching they need could make all the difference in where that child ended up. That is why she loved it, and that is why she was a force."

While many remember their kin-

dergarten teachers as simply "sweet," Mrs. Verkuylen commanded the room with purpose, discipline and profound love.

"She knew the stakes were too high for anything less," Paula says. "Everything she did had meaning because she believed excellence was never optional. She loved teaching because she knew she wasn't just managing a classroom; she was actively shaping futures, one mind at a time, at the exact moment it mattered most."

With an adventurous spirit, she loved travelling the world, listening to music and attending live sporting events and concerts.

Mrs. Verkuylen lived a life guided by faith and filled with love, laughter and resilience. She will be deeply missed but fondly remembered, her legacy carried on by those who were lucky enough to know her.

Mrs. Verkuylen is survived by her children, Paula Vrzic (Milos) and Annemarie; her grandchild, Emilija; her sister and brothers: Margaret Ettinger (James), Patrick (Diane), Gerald (Evelyn), Stephen and Michael (Jackson); and many cousins, nieces and nephews.

To read some of Mrs. Verkuylen's favorite memories and see what former students say they learned from her, see VERKUYLEN, page 6.

STAFF & FACULTY

Sharon Dolan
Principal 1999-2000

Irene Soumakian
Principal

Audrey Hoffmann
School Secretary

Jeanne Honikel
Health Room 1988-1997

Janet Llewellyn
Pre-K teacher

Lisa Bartholemey
Librarian 2018-2022

Maureen Haskins
Science & Computer
Teacher

Religious

Sr. Jane Bonar

Sr. Eveleen Conlon

Sr. Maria Fitzgerald

Sr. Mary Cabrini Fortune

Mother Mary Jarlath

Sr. Florence Lowler

Sr. Anne Marie McKenna

Sr. Margarita Meenahan

Sr. Rita O'Connell (aka Sr.

Mary dePazzi)

Sr. Frances O'Leary

Sr. Mary Raphael (aka Sr.

Carmel Lynch)

Sr. Cabrini Riordan

STUDENTS

Peggy Sue (Bunch) Nay
Class of 1975

Timothy Michael Bunch
Class of 1975

James Muckenthaler
Class of 1978

Julie Griffis
Class of 1980

Darin Haskins
Class of 1980

Charlie Levandowski
Class of 1980

Paul Molthen
Class of 1980

Bunk Wurth
Class of 1984

Mieke (Riccio) Small
Class of 1986

Ronald Arlt
Class of 1986

Greg Aarl
Class of 1990

James Hall
Class of 1994

Jonathan Schulte
Class of 2002

Alexander Benuzzi
Class of 2008

Kevin Hogate
Class of 2012



St. Norbert Catholic School

60th ANNIVERSARY

celebrated Saturday,
Nov. 8, 2025

Photos courtesy Steven Georges / OC Catholic



FAVORITE MEMORIES

As told by daughter Paula:

The Ultimate Halloween Disguise: That time she dressed up in the school uniform for Halloween and actually got kicked out of the computer lab! Because of her petite stature, another teacher completely mistook her for a student breaking the rules, leading to a hilarious moment of realization when they figured out she was actually their colleague.

The Infamous Christmas Concert Omission: The legendary kindergarten Christmas performance where her

brother served as the pianist. One year, he accidentally skipped "Go Tell It on the Mountain" - the absolute crowd favorite. One of her former students regularly reminded her how upset he was that he missed out on singing it!

Hands-On Physics for 5-Year-Olds: Her passion for teaching real-world concepts early on, like introducing her kindergarteners to physics. She had them design and build their own model clay boats, turning the classroom into a hands-on lab to test which designs floated and which ones sank.

One-Woman Coach: A personal memo-

ry of mine was when my mom coached my eighth-grade Academic Decathlon team. My mom single-handedly coached every single subject, Super Quiz, and Logic category - while other schools brought entire teams of teachers - staying up late to craft custom study guides and ultimately leading us to the school's inaugural first-place victory. Looking into the audience, I'll never forget seeing her smiling because she had already tallied the points in her notebook; she knew we had won before we did, and she was proud not for herself, but because she had helped us succeed.

LESSONS FROM FORMER STUDENTS

Ever the teacher, in lieu of a condolence book, Mrs. Verkuylen requested that friends, family and former students complete what she dubbed "Your Final Assignment - Lessons from Mrs. Verkuylen." If you wish to participate, you can do so by physically signing the book at the Viewing/Rosary or Funeral, or digitally by sending an email to MrsVerkuylenMemorial@gmail.com. She hopes this assignment will help her legacy live on and impart her wisdom to her daughters, granddaughter and family.

"She taught me how to study! Time spent in early morning academic decathlon sessions was really the earliest exposure I had to real, hardcore studying. I can only imagine that experience was what set me up for the SAT, college education, grad school, board exams, etc. I wouldn't be where I am without Mrs. V!! And I still bring a logic puzzle book every time I have a long trip."

"In kindergarten, Mrs. V assigned a virtue to each month. I watched classmates receive awards for embodying them, never expecting one myself. Then, to my surprise, Mrs. V awarded me with "Most Perseverant" one month. That small moment became a defining thread in my life. What began as a quiet whisper of you can do it has grown into a steady inner voice, one that carries me through life with resilience and fortitude, even 30 years later."

"It's not hyperbolic to say that beyond my parents, Mrs. Verkuylen has been one of the most influential figures in shaping the person I am today. Since the very early years in kindergarten, she has been a constant source of support, encouragement, and a healthy dose of reality-wrapped-in-love when needed...It's hard to think of a world without Mrs. Verkuylen in it. It doesn't seem fair that someone so committed to making the world better must leave it. For those of us lucky enough to have called her a teacher, a mentor, and friend, we now have an obligation to pay it forward and foster excellence in others. There will be many tributes to the life Mrs. Verkuylen led, and deservedly so. I can think of no better way to honor her and everything she stood for than to continue living my life striving to be the best version of myself...the version that Mrs. Verkuylen knew existed within me when she welcomed me into her classroom in 1997."

"It'll seem like a silly memory but one day we all had to line up and march outside for some kind of assembly. You had us practice and you told us to keep our hands out of our pockets. You made sure we knew if we walked with our hands in our pockets we might hurt ourselves. We could trip and not be able to catch ourselves you said! You even demonstrated what that might look like for us visual learners. It's such a silly memory. But to this day I make sure to keep my hands out of my pockets when I walk. Safety first! You gave us numbers to remember for when we lined up and I was number 8. It instantly became my favorite number. I never told anyone why it was my favorite, but in my heart you gave it to me. I was 8, and 8 was me. Isn't that funny? The silly things you remember when you have the chance to look back and appreciate life and all its randomness."

"Mrs. Verkuylen taught me to think outside the box. Having been my logic coach, this would make sense. Approach problems in logic, and in life, with an open mind; there are many different, creative ways to find the solution, as long as you remember to think logically. Because of Mrs. Verkuylen, I have a love of logic grid puzzles, as well as many fond memories of decathlon practices filled with fun and laughter. She truly was a vital part of my elementary education, and I look back on my time with her with admiration, gratitude, and love. Her passion knows no bounds, and her impact will forever leave a lasting mark on not only me, but the many other people whose lives were touched by her."

HANNAH, from page 1

been an amazing experience.

"So much of my time here has been shaped by the school I am at, both from the family I have created, as well as the day-to-day learning and flying," Hannah says. "As of the beginning of June, I am a certified flight instructor. I will be receiving my own students, helping them through Mauna Loa's Professional Pilot Program. I will continue to build hours, experience and connections as I come closer to finding out where I will land long term."

Hannah says she has many fond SNCS memories, including Sunday academic decathlon study sessions in the couch room, Pi-Day potluck with her math class and getting to lead Field Day in seventh grade.

"I would have to say my favorite teacher comes down to a tie between Mrs. Nguyen, Mrs.

Stephens and Mr. C as my academic decathlon coach," Hannah says. "Each one of them were great about helping me and other students play to their strengths and creating a classroom environment that students truly wanted to be a part of. SNCS helped push me toward this career by helping me discover how I learn and work best. I found that hands-on, more mechanical things came easier as well as finding my love of teaching and leading in all of the volunteer opportunities I had."

(Above right) While Hannah was working toward her private pilot's license at HeliStream flight school in Costa Mesa she made her first cross country solo flight. (Right) At age 8, Hannah hopped in a helicopter at the Air and Space Museum in San Diego for a quick photo.



PLANNED
Giving

LEAVE A
Legacy
THAT TRANSCENDS TIME



Imagine the impact
you can have
on the future of
Catholic education.

Ensure your legacy
with Planned Giving to
St. Norbert Catholic School.



To learn more, scan
the QR code or visit

www.saintnorbertschool.org/planned-giving

(714) 637-6822 information@saintnorbertschool.org