

St. Dominic's Alumni Association

VOL 24

AUTUMN 2025

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our Alumni Association is sharing a website with St. Dominic's Family services. See copies of last newsletters and photos on the site: <https://sdfs.org/take-action/get-connected.html>

Please share a story, memory or Shout Out for the next newsletter. Contact: Joseph Olano (951) 660-9463 or Pamela DiMaio (516) 840-3008. Or email stdominicalum@gmail.com. We will respond as quickly as we can.

PLEASE BE SURE TO NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGES.



Editor's Note

Well, it is that time of the year again where we salute those who served our country. Yes, I am speaking about Veterans' Day.

This year we celebrate on Tuesday, November 11, 2025. In America, recognition occurs in many different ways and it is not confined to just a single day each year.

Veterans and non-veterans alike may give back by volunteering at events like "Veggies for Veterans." This is a grant funded program that partners with local Veterans' Administration Medical Hospital and gives up to 600 bags of produce free of charge to veterans.

Another example of giving back may be joining the memberships of the American Legion, Knights of Columbus, or the Veterans of Foreign Wars and help promote their legacies. They also help raise scholarship funds for college bound high school graduates of veteran families.

St. Dominic's has had a rich history in all branches of the United States military services.

We look forward to Veterans' Day 2026, when we can explore expanding our issue to include a now and then photo with a 150 word summary of your military and community experiences after your service

I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any comments, please send them to me.

Have a Happy Veterans' Day!

Respectfully, *Joseph A. Olano, Editor*

Shout Out to:



**DAVID & PAT
MACMILLAN**

Happy 65th
Wedding Anniversary

EVELYN ROBLES

would like to connect with
Daisy Pagan and Eddie Rivera

ERIC BURNS

would like to connect with
Barry D and Cathy McNary



St. Dominic's Alumni Staff

Joseph A. Olano Editor
Pam (Mason) DiMaio Treasurer
Bob Moore Staff Support
George Chue Staff Writer



Angel Mendez (August 8, 1946 - March 16, 1967) was a Vietnam war hero who gave his life in the service of his country.

Between 1956 and 1958 he received his primary education at St. Dominic's Home in Blauvelt, N.Y. In 1964 he graduated from high school while living at the Mission of the Im-

maculate Virgin, an orphanage in Mount Loretto, Staten Island N. Y. He was one of eight siblings in his family and had a fascination with the military, and was a member of his high school cadet corps.

What makes United States Marine Corps Sergeant Angel Mendez unique and special, is his selfless and courageous behavior as a soldier and a human being.

On March 16, 1967, Sgt. Mendez was on patrol with his company and suddenly they came under attack. A section of his platoon was pinned down, and he led his squad to rescue them under heavy fire. His platoon commander, Lieutenant Ronald D. Castille, was seriously wounded and unable to move. Mendez came to his aide and carried him on his back with heavy fire and shielded him until he took him to safety. Mendez was mortally wounded and saved Lt. Castille's life.

Castille suffered severe injuries and was left immobilized.

Mendez suffered fatal injuries but managed to rescue the lieutenant.

Mendez was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. There is an effort to upgrade his recognition to the Medal of Honor.

SGT. ANGEL MENDEZ UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

by Joseph A. Olano

Below are the awards presented to Sgt. Mendez according to the rows of military awards, or ribbons on a uniform:

- Row 1: Navy Cross
- Row 2: Purple Heart - Navy and Marine Corps
Commendation Medal with Combat "V"
Combat Action Ribbon
- Row 3: Navy Presidential Unit Citation -
Navy Unit Commendation -
Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation
- Row 4: Marine Good Conduct Medal -
National Defense Service Medal -
Vietnam Service Medal
with one (1) Bronze Service Star.
- Row 5: Vietnam Military Merit Medal -
Vietnam Wounded Medal-
Republic Vietnam Civil Actions Medal
2nd Class
- Row 6: Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation -
Vietnam Civil Actions Medal Unit Citation
Vietnam Campaign Medal

In 2011 the St. George Post Office in Staten Island was renamed to the Sergeant Angel Mendez Post Office.

In July 2019, the South Richmond High School in Pleasant Plains Staten Island was renamed the Sgt. Angel Mendez Learning Center.

Not bad for a kid from St. Dominic's.

Happy Veterans' Day
SGT. Angel Mendez

*I Salute You and
Thank You for
Your Bravery!*



Lately, I've been thinking about work...

Lately, I've been thinking about work.'

"Why in the world would you be thinking about work, when you've been retired for almost twenty years," asked the little angel who often nags me in the bubble above my head. "You're supposed to be finishing the mystery novel you wanted to write before you die. Stop stalling."

The recent Alumni reunion, and the sharing of so many memories from so many years ago is why I'm now thinking about all the jobs I had from the time I was seven to eleven and I lived in Dormitory Four.

Everyone at the reunion had stories: some sad, some heartwarming, some encouraging, some funny. I'm not too sure where my story about work fits in, and although I remember many of the jobs I held during that time, details like how long I did the job, or when, are not a part of the memory. So, if you are reading this, maybe you can help me out.

ToothPowder: My first job was doling out Dr. Lyon's Tooth Powder to all the girls, maybe at night, in the morning, or both? Each girl would take her toothbrush from her slot in the washroom, hold out her cupped hand, I would pour in what I thought was enough powder, and she would go off to brush her teeth.

Sewing holey socks: Not religious or prayerful, but socks donated with other clothing, and came with little holes. As puzzling as it may be about why donated socks came with holes, at the time it was an opportunity for me to learn how to sew, how to thread the needle, knot the end of the thread, and make careful small, even stitches, with patience. A group of us did the sewing in the room I now call the Parlor. Along one wall of the Parlor was a closet system and we sat in a circle, on the floor, listening to music on the radio.

Showers: to younger children, included washing their hair... which was a challenge because we used Kirkman Borax Soap and tried not to get soap in their eyes.

Linen Closet and laundry: I think we folded sheets and pillow cases, or they came that way from the laundry and then we stacked them. I think we also put away clothing, either from the laundry, or donations, in designated bins, but not sure, However! There were forty plus girls in Dormitory Four, so there was a process for each girl getting necessary clothing, if they didn't have their own to store in their cubicle in the Parlor.

Bedmaking: For a period of time, I made a row of eight beds every morning before school. I think I was in fifth grade, so would have been ten or eleven. There was no such thing as fitted sheets, at that time, so I got very good at making hospital corners.

Sweeping the hall stairs with a small hand broom: the stairway was wide and the steps were stone. I swept the stair from side to side, and the dirt into a dust pan. I may have been in a bad mood because someone, who shall remain nameless, was coming up the stairs and stepped in the dirt ... so I smacked her in the mouth with the back of the small hand broom.

To this day, ... and, yes, I do think of her often, I regret giving her a fat lip ... and pray she's forgiven me.

Dusting the pipes: The walls in our dormitory had rows of heat pipes (I think painted brown). The pipes had to be dusted often, and I thought a fun job because it also got the pipes ready to make toast. Yes! Toast!

Sometimes, when we were already in bed, a sister in charge when Sister Marie Imelda wasn't there, would give out slices of leftover bread sent over from the refectory. Whoever wanted to, could wrap the bread around the hot pipe and make toast! The lucky girls who had the beds along the walls at that time, were very, very popular.

Waxing the floors: Once or twice a year, all the beds and chairs in the dormitory were moved somewhere? while we were in school and Johnson's Paste Wax was spread over the entire floor. When we came home from school, we went to work polishing the floor... laughing out loud as we sat on thick cloth, pushing, sliding, and bumping into each other along the way, as we polished the paste wax to a beautiful shine.

Best Job Ever! Setting the tables: My older sister Marian and I would leave the dormitory early in the morning, even before everyone was up and dressed. We would go in the dark and cold of winter, to set the tables in the refectory dining room for our Dormitory. The challenge ... not to be seen by the nun in charge of the kitchen or any other sisters, because we weren't supposed to be there (I think.) However, SMI wanted everything ready for the girls to arrive, so they could be served first and get back to the dorm and ready for school.

Competition? Sibling rivalry? Drama queens? Who knows, but Marian and I were quiet and quick, and very curious about the sisters and the canisters outside the kitchen door, holding the Monday night movie. The canisters were left possibly in the middle of the night, and labeled with the name of the movie! This event was held every Monday night (I think) in what I believe was the building with the gym, where we sat on the floor and watched the movie. So, Marian and I knew before everyone else!

As much as I wish I had more solid details, I don't, because what I have is not just the memory, but the memory of the experience which has helped form the person I've become.

Two examples: First, the tooth powder measuring ... eyeballing ingredients is my one solid rule for cooking and baking; example one... the recipe for my world famous rugelach calls for enough cinnamon to make the sugar look like the color of coffee regular, no need to measure; Second, the refectory kitchen drama ... and the fun of wondering What if ... and how I finally started writing what I hope will become a published mystery series... think amateur sleuth Nancy Drew in the twenty first century.

Finally, the memories always remind me of how blessed my life has become.

Virginia Synan Swartz 1947-1951



Reunion Update

Saturday, September 27, the day of our reunion, was reminiscent of so many Festivals held by the Sisters - sunny and warm. Alumni traveled great distances in hopes of seeing cottage mates they had not seen in fifty years. Lydia Olano traveled from Arizona, Marti Ramirez White came from Texas, Evelyn Robles from Florida, Francisco and Carmen Albarran from Connecticut, and Roque Pizarro from Buffalo, New York.



When you meet someone you have not seen in decades, it is a momentous occasion. When you know someone largely through stories contributed to our newsletter, or through phone conversations, texts and emails, and finally meet after sharing so much of your history, an instant bond is formed. You hear a familiar voice and think, "I know you!"

The beautiful Huston Room adjacent to the Sisters' dining room added to the feeling of nostalgia with its tall windows and high ceilings similar to the rooms we lived in years ago. We were so near the chapel, we could probably recall many solemn occasions of worship there.

While chatting, we ate snacks, candy and delicious chicken, Italian and roasted vegetable wraps, fruit and a garden salad. Then an enormous cake quickly disappeared even after our sumptuous meal. Some alumni walked the grounds remembering special places they would frequent as a child. A few visited the graves of loved ones and deceased Sisters in the cemetery. It was wonderful to share a meal, laughter and memories in the place that will always be special to us. Some of us were surrounded by family members, so different from our childhood years when we yearned for family members despite the Sisters' devoted care.

2026 will mark 20 years for our Alumni Association. Let us know what we can do to make next year's reunion memorable too; seeing former cottage mates and meeting new friends is an experience not to be missed.

Reunion Update



2025 REUNION ATTENDEES

Francisco Albarran & Carmen | Peter Borgia | Pamela Mason DiMaio & Pete | Jeannette Borgia Earl
 Mark A. Griffith, Jr. | Greg Ludwig & family | David & Pat MacMillan & Andrew | Ted Mason
 Umberto Matos & son Ian and girlfriend | Patti Borgia Mazzella | Christine McLaughlin | Bob Moore
 Lydia Olano | Roque Pizarro & | Evelyn Robles & daughter.... | Nancy Serrano & daughter Cynthia
 Millie Isquierdo Stanton & | Virginia Synan Swartz & Rich
 Norma Gonzalez Turner & Michael | Marti Ramirez White, son Eric and nieces
 Cindy, Sabrina and Elizabeth | Sr. Jane Francis | Sr. Jo-Anne | Sr. Liz Engel | Sr Mary Doris

Sincere apologies if we missed your name.

OH THE PLACES WE WENT !!!

When we lived with the sisters, an outing to Rye Playland, Coney Island, Bear Mountain or to a movie like *A Hard Days Night* was a welcome break in our daily routine and talked about endlessly. Sometimes volunteers would accompany us on these outings and buy lots of treats. However, leaving the country on trips happened also.



In 1964, when June Dotts was 8 years old, she and Robert Andrews received scholarships to participate in a Goodwill Singing Tour. After Sister Catherine Jerome and others raised money for their travel expenses, they visited several churches in France and Czechoslovakia singing on stages with other children from the United States. Often their only accompaniment was a guitar. A memorable treat abroad was visiting Dracula's Castle in Transylvania. Another fun experience was watching women mix cement with their feet to create blocks for houses; they also saw women crush grapes with their feet like Lucy Ricardo did.

When June was 13, she again traveled abroad, this time to visit Puerto Rico with Father Stanley, Sister Catherine Jerome, and seven other girls. Jenny Sanchez also accompanied the group. Old San Juan, New San Juan, Ponce and Fajardo were among the sights they visited. The trip holds special fondness for Jenny; Sr. Catherine Jerome took her to meet her grandmother and aunt for the first time high in the mountains of Mayagueza.

Pedro Calderone (aka Chicken Legs) and Vincent Oppenheimer remember taking a great bus trip to Montreal for Expo 67 with the sisters. For four days, they saw the sights and stayed in a hotel. "It was the best trip ever," Vincent said with the exception of leaving his special pictures on the bed in the hotel room.

Trips closer to Blauvelt included Father Farrell "grabbing a bunch of guys and driving to New York City to feed them rice and beans at *Cuchifritos*," according to Greg Ludwig. During the 1967 Easter vacation, Greg and his brother could not go home, so Fr. Farrell took the boys on a fishing trip and Greg won a trophy for catching the largest fish. Who can forget Father Farrell surrounded by a cluster of boys and girls choosing fortunate kids to take rides in his station wagon to go to the beach. You wore a smile if you were chosen and a frown if not.

Evelyn Robles remembers Father Farrell driving her and Karen Hurt to Rhode Island to see his sister. She tasted his sister's home cooking - real butter and hot rolls, fluffy scrambled eggs for breakfast and an indescribable lunch - but she felt she could not compliment the cook too much or Father Farrell would know she didn't "love" the food from the refectory - not an uncommon reaction to institutional fare!



In Memoriam

ALUMS

William Boo
died December 29, 2023

James E. Merna
died July 28, 2025
buried at Quantico National

Jim (Jimmy) Thomson died March 4, 2025 in the Bronx.

*Jim (Jimmy) Thomson was a resident of St. Dominic's Home from 1949 until 1957.
A retired NYC Transit Policeman, he was predeceased by his 12-year-old daughter, Shani.*

Survivors include his sisters Dianne and Lily.

*Jim spent summers at his Greenwood Lake cottage, but not until failing health set in,
did Jim miss the Sisters' Annual Fall Festival.*

Jim was a longtime supporter of our Alumni Association. Rest in peace Jimmy.

SISTERS

Sr. Dominic Marie McDonnell, OP, died May 26, 2025

Sr. Victoria Sloane, OP, died September 28, 2025



Please pray for

all deceased Convent
Kids and their families

the many who are fighting illnesses
those struggling with life's challenges

all sisters, priests, and laypeople
who have mothered,
educated and cared for us

all families who have lost loved ones
while serving their country

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

To Rekindle Old Friendships
to Make New Ones

Since 1878, the Sisters of St. Dominic have played a vital role in shaping the lives of thousands of children. Many of these children grew up to become nurses, social workers, police officers, firefighters, and administrators in hospitals, schools, and government agencies. Others served in all branches of the military, worked as postal carriers, construction workers, supervisors and stockbrokers on Wall Street or became business owners. Each alumnus's success stands as a lasting tribute to the Sisters and the values they instilled.

St. Dominic's Alumni Association

St. Dominic's Alumni Association
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Do you know...?

Do you know *the kids dressed up as a sister and Mr. Moloney?*

Do you know *who became a musician after watching B.B.King on TV at the convent? (He would make instruments out of found objects.)*

Do you know *who wore a kilt in one of the St. Patrick's Day shows? Sr. Mary Ellen, behind the stage curtains, told him to only move his lips because his voice was changing.*