



Campus Connection

Look at what's up on the campuses of Erie's other colleges



Mercyhurst mourns student's murder

ETHAN MAGOC
Editor-in-chief, *The Merciad*

Time and space transformed.

A time to gather again and return to classes—a sense of routine having returned after a short break.

A place to celebrate evening Mass among peers in Mercyhurst College's Catholic tradition. Instead, Christ the King Chapel offered neither on Sunday night for the Mercyhurst community.

But to an overflowing crowd of hundreds, the college's wooden chapel and its foyer at the east end of Old Main provided much more during a memorial service for deceased student Jenni-Lyn Watson.

Watson was murdered Nov. 19 at her home in Liverpool, N.Y., where she had returned the day before from Mercyhurst and its fall trimester.

As the refrain from "On Eagle's Wings" came to a close midway through Sunday's prayer vigil, dozens of students—many of whom barely knew or had never even met Watson—could be heard openly sobbing.

Like he had done four days prior during a prayer service for Watson's safe return, the Rev. James Piszker, the college chaplain, strode across the altar and spoke helpful but painful words.

"The question comes to mind, 'Was our (Wednesday) prayer in vain? Was our hope misplaced?'" He asked of the assembled.

"I'm here to tell you that neither of those things are true," Piszker said.

Piszker and other campus personnel have already put forth a full effort to assist students grieving over the gruesome tragedy.

Her murder

Watson, a 20-year-old junior dance major, was at her home on the morning of Nov. 19.

New York authorities allege that Steven Pieper, a man she dated on and off for approximately 18 months, arrived at her house that morning and an argument ensued.

Onondaga County District Attorney William Fitzpatrick said Pieper likely killed Watson, carried her body into his Volkswagen that he had backed into the family garage, then drove two miles north to Clay Central Park.

There, after a five-day police search, Watson's remains were discovered Saturday morning near an amphitheater by New York police. "Within a very short period of time (after her death, she was

dumped like garbage in Clay Central Park," Fitzpatrick said at a Nov. 27 news conference.

Pieper, 21, was charged with second degree murder a few hours after Watson's body was discovered. Police suspect he acted out of jealousy and anger after Watson broke off the relationship and a year-long engagement in October.

He immediately pleaded not guilty at Saturday's arraignment and will next appear in a Clay court on Friday.

An autopsy was performed on Watson's body Sunday which confirmed it a homicide, but police are waiting for tissue samples to determine an exact cause of death.

Community efforts

Mere hours after her disappearance became clear to Watson's family and local police last weekend, word spread rapidly via Facebook to keep watch for a 20-year-old female of approximately 5 feet, 3 inches and 100 pounds.

"She was little, but she was spunky," said friend and fellow junior dancer Amy Deer. "Her energy

was amazing."

Friends and family attempted to reciprocate that energy during the weeklong search and subsequent mourning period.

Devin Ruic, Watson's friend and a columnist for *The Merciad*, began a Facebook group early on titled "MISSING: Jenni-Lyn Watson" that eventually garnered more than 27,000 members.

"It was amazing to see how much one person could be loved," said Rachel Torgesen, another junior dance classmate and close friend of Watson.

Many friends have already created remembrance slideshows with the wealth of photos Watson had posted to her Facebook and Myspace accounts.

Mercyhurst's Counseling Center and Campus Ministry are each offering their services to anyone struggling with Watson's passing.

Students who desired to be at her 11:30 a.m. funeral today in the Syracuse area left on a bus from the Performing Arts Center parking lot at 5 a.m.

In addition to the temporary memorial to Watson in Zurn Hall's lobby,

the dance department is selling green ribbons with Watson's initials on them for a dollar each.

All proceeds will be donated to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

And Mercyhurst President Dr. Thomas Gamble has already established the Jenni-Lyn Watson Memorial Dance Scholarship for future Mercyhurst dancers. Donations can be made at <http://giving.mercyhurst.edu/jennilyn>.

Tauna Hunter, dance department chair, believes Watson's friends and classmates will find the most solace with one another.

"The most important support they have is for each other," she said.

Memories of Watson

Jenni-Lyn Watson's death comes at the end of a tough year of tragedies for Mercyhurst.

In February, adult student Matthew Weber died in his Lewis Avenue apartment the day after winter term final exams ended. Weber was a 27-year-old graphic design major. Less than two weeks after school began in September, women's hockey

assistant coach Kristen Cameron was struck by a drunk driver while riding her bicycle in Erie.

She continues to rehabilitate a severe spinal chord injury, but remains paralyzed from the chest down in a Toronto hospital.

And Matthew Lieberman, a 2010 alumnus, succumbed to Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma on Oct. 6. He was 23.

Watson's passing now carries a similarly terrible and somber process for Mercyhurst's 70 dance majors and others who knew her.

"It will not be easy," Piszker said Sunday night. "It will take time. But it will ultimately provide us with the consolation that we so desperately desire."

Hunter, who last watched Watson perform at SoMar Dance Works' MOVERS & SHAKERS show on Nov. 13, believes peace and hope will slowly return to her department and its students.

But how? "Our department is very close, so we have a large family to take care of," she says. "but dance is a healing art."

"We'll keep dancing."



Mercyhurst College students and chaplain Rev. Jim Piszker (left) gather at Christ the King Chapel for a prayer service on Sunday, Nov. 28, 2010.

Changes imminent for Gannon's SGA

ABBY BADACH
editor-in-chief, *The Gannon Knight*

Major changes may be in store for Gannon University's Student Government Association, including amending the organization's constitution, eliminating unnecessary committees and slashing the number of student representatives for each class.

The obstacle: finding a way to put these ideas into action.

SGA will vote on one proposed solution – bringing in a pair of private consultants to help restructure the organization – at the general assembly meeting at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in Room 219 of the Waldron Campus Center.

If the motion passes, the consultants – Nick Tarant and Steve Wymer, co-founders of the American Student Government Association – would be paid for with approximately \$8,000 from SGA's "special projects" account. Other options, like finding an internal consultant with

Gannon's organizational learning and leadership doctoral program, will also be discussed at Thursday's meeting.

The special projects account – a fund made up of money collected from 37 percent of students' \$56/semester activities fee – currently has \$33,600 in available funds, said SGA president and senior political science major Tom Panighetti. Unspent special projects money rolls over from year to year.

Some students say the price tag for the consultants is just too high.

"Eight thousand dollars is a lot of money to be spending on something like that, and it could be better spent at other places around campus," said Patrick Chounet, a junior math major. "Besides, the people on that board will only last for at most four years – maybe five."

A group of eight students who attended a student government "anti-conference" facilitated by Tarant and Wymer presented at the Nov. 18 general assembly meeting to pro-

pose the changes.

Allison Adkins, a junior liberal studies major and SGA class representative, said the anti-conference challenged her to think about connecting SGA's efforts with the student body as a whole.

"There's really no activity going on outside of the meetings, and that's what we want to try and bring back – having more projects, doing more things for the students and hearing what students want. We don't really have a bond with the students. A lot of the students don't know what we do."

"We need an outside person to come in and say, 'Well, this is what we've seen work, and this is what we've seen that has helped people in the past,'" she said. "A lot of the people who went to the anti-conference think that if we hold off on it and we just push it back, it's never going to happen."

Currently, SGA has nine representatives per class, but the presenters suggested cutting that number to

a number like five or seven people to make SGA more efficient.

Kathleen Gausman, associate dean of student development and SGA faculty adviser, said the number of representatives per class was upped from seven to nine between three and four years ago when the then-president of SGA thought it would provide a wider range of student representation.

Gausman applauded the presenters and acknowledged that although the vote didn't go through during the Nov. 18 meeting, there is still an opportunity for SGA members to integrate ideas from the anti-conference in a timeline that will be satisfactory for all involved.

"So many times we're afraid of change," she said. "I think it's always good to take a critical eye to how we do things, with the intention of making them better... it's not change just for change's sake. It's change because we want to see it get better, be progressive or to get with the times."

Contact us

Our offices are located in the bottom floor of the Reed building, office 3, right next to the Personal Counseling Office

Tel: (814) 899-6488
Fax: (814) 899-6019

The Behrend Beacon
4701 College Drive
Erie, Pa 16563
Room 3

If you have a news story for the *Beacon* or want to submit feedback, e-mail us:

Editor: editor@psu.edu
News: cis5060@psu.edu
Opinion: opinion@psu.edu
Sports: sports@psu.edu
Culture: culture@psu.edu
Website: editor@psu.edu
Photos: photoeditor@psu.edu
Advertising and Business: behrendbeaconads@gmail.com