

# EXCELSIOR NEWS

A Quarterly Newsletter from the Office of the President

June 2022



As this 2021-22 school year ends, I am beyond grateful that Sacred Heart Academy continues to thrive as a remarkable community with abundant spirit, notable scholarship, and generous service. This year the "sparkle" returned to the halls of SHA as we once again celebrated so many of our traditions in-person and found so much joy in being together.

Most recently, we saw the sparkle in all our seniors as they wrapped up their time here at Sacred Heart Academy. The Class of 2022 embodied everything that an Excelsior Woman stands for. As Salutatorian Chiamaka Alino stated "We as a class that represents the future cannot underestimate the impact we can have. Our class is full of future engineers and scientists, future doctors and researchers, future teachers, and musicians, as well as future athletes and policy makers. We will all find ourselves in positions that can impact those around us and make a change."

We had the privilege to watch this class grow and I know that the world of today will be a better world tomorrow because of them.

An enormous thank you to the entire SHA community - our parents, our alumnae, our grandparents and friends who support the SHA experience and allow us to 'sparkle' bright. Thank you for believing in us and our mission. Know that we are grateful beyond words for whatever it was that you did for us this year... parking cars, hosting events, preparing our gardens, staying in touch, playing golf and bidding in our auctions, sharing your talents and supporting us philanthropically. I am humbled by your involvement and generosity!

*St. Maria Odessa*



## Top Ranking Students from the Class of 2022

Truly motivated by faith, love, and sisterhood, this extraordinary group of young women achieved so much during a remarkably challenging time in our world. And while academic achievements including over \$30 million in college scholarships, multiple merit awards and 3 athletic state championships are among them, perhaps the greatest achievement has been the renewed sense of spirit and sisterhood that they brought back to our school. These young women harnessed their power as leaders and mentors to reinvigorate our student community.

We want to give special recognition to our top ranking students from the class of 2022:

**Mehr Chhatre** - Valedictorian  
**Chiamaka Alino** - Salutatorian  
**Nikita Khanna** - 3rd Highest Ranking  
**Delfina Ferro** - 4th Highest Ranking  
**Kelsey Le** - Tied 5th Highest Ranking  
**Julia DiAngelo** - Tied 5th Highest Ranking

To learn more about these incredible six young women, [click here!](#)

## A Farewell to Faculty Members Rich Marino and Fran Saukas

As this academic year ended Sacred Heart Academy celebrated two beloved teachers who have had a great impact on life at SHA for over two decades. Mr. Marino and Mrs. Saukas will both be retiring this summer after a long legacy of educating and nurturing SHA students, inspired by the charisma and mission of Sacred Heart Academy.



**Rich Marino has had a remarkable tenure at SHA!** He started teaching at Sacred Heart Academy in January 2000 and has since taught CP Western Civilization; Honors Western Civilization; and 20th Century United States History. Somewhere along the way, Rich's teaching career at SHA led him to additionally teach three Honors Western Civ classes and two 20th Century United States History classes. In more recent years, Rich also taught AP classes in United States Government and Politics and European History, an experience he truly enjoyed.

Outside the classroom, Rich has always found ways to be involved with the SHA community. During his first ten years, he was part of school productions including Bye, Bye Birdie, The Sound of Music and West Side Story. To help bring awareness and support to the school's fundraising initiatives, Rich performed various comedy routines at Auctions and one year, he even auctioned himself off as a waiter to one lucky family! Additionally, Rich took an active role in Freshman Orientation, Kairos retreats, Proms, and countless other initiatives during his 20 year + tenure.

Looking back at his time at SHA, Rich says his favorite moments were his conversations with hundreds of students and teaching them to think beyond the written word. Rich had a special way of connecting with the students he taught, whether by relating the chosen topic to his own experiences or bringing his wit and humor into the classroom. It is no surprise that when we speak with alumnae who were fortunate to have Mr. Marino as a teacher, he is one of the first people they ask about.

As we congratulate Rich on his retirement, we are grateful for his years of service to SHA and for dedicating his life to being an educator – We will miss him.

**Fran Saukas** began her career at SHA in 1993, after teaching at Sacred Heart High School in Waterbury. Teaching both chemistry and honors chemistry, Fran then led our first ever integrated science course for freshmen. While Fran's primary focus was teaching biology, human anatomy and physiology, she also taught many science electives - genetics, immunology, human gene discovery lab and others. Fran led SHA in starting our AP biology course, developed the ECE portion with the University of Connecticut and worked closely with Sr. Mary Jane Paoletta to establish a course in forensic science – a popular science course at SHA today!

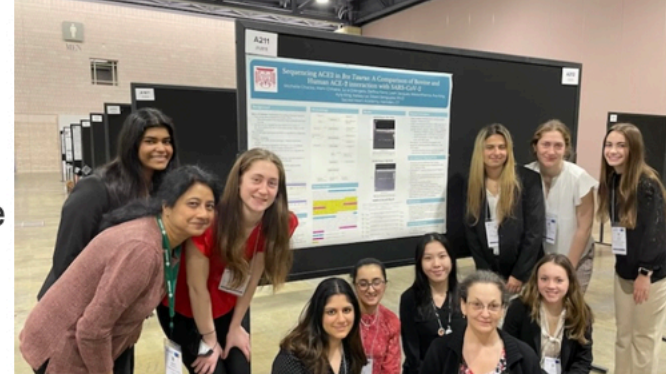


In addition to her passion for science, Fran cherishes the years dedicated to the production of the musical. In fact, did you know that Mrs. Saukas initiated the move of our annual show to the Shubert Theater? A wonderful accomplishment that has had a long-lasting impact for so many generations of SHA performers. Other fond memories include taking her anatomy students to the anatomy lab at the Yale School of Medicine with Dr. William Stewart, leading field trips to many places including Spain, New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., and Newport. And of course, Holiday Hill!

After being here for nearly three decades, Fran will miss her SHA routine, but most of all, her students. Fran found joy in watching them (almost 3,000 girls!) grow and become Excelsior women. Having worked alongside her colleagues for so many years, Fran will also be dearly missed by the entire SHA faculty.

## STEM Highlights at SHA

STEM has been at the core of who we are and one of the many things that makes us proud at SHA. We are happy to share our explorations in this field are always growing as our students continue to reach *ever higher*.



For the first time this fall, SHA girls started a Technology Student Association (TSA) chapter, competing in a variety of STEM competitions such as the Tech Bowl, Graphic Design, Digital Storytelling, Video production, and Biotechnology Design. Even more impressive in its first year, students involved in TSA won in several categories at the Regionals and will be traveling to Texas on June 26th to compete in the TSA Nationals!

Furthermore, our "Only at SHA" Excelsior Class Honors Biotechnology continues to impress us with their work and achievements. In April, the class comprised of juniors and seniors presented their research on the sequence of the ACE-2 gene and how it interacts with the SARS-CoV-2 viral spike protein at the 'Experimental Biology '22' meeting in Philadelphia. In June, they presented their ACE-2 gene research to Dr. Andrea Baccarelli's lab at the School of Public Health at Columbia University via Zoom. Both presentations required these students to commit extra time outside of their class to conduct their research effectively. We admire their steadfast dedication and hard work.

## Philanthropy Spotlight

As we conclude our 75th anniversary celebrations, we reflect on the various milestones we achieved as a community. Together, we have raised close to \$500,000 for our Annual Fund, a record year for this important fund which boosts our school's annual operating budget. Our Golf, Auction and Raffle raised an additional \$100,000 in support of our financial assistance program. Our Reunion efforts continue to grow and we have seen a significant increase in reunion giving from all classes. We are humbled by your generosity and support and proud of your love for SHA!

If you have not had a chance to make your gift yet this year, there are two weeks left before the Annual Fund closes on June 30. Join us in making this a banner year for SHA and our fundraising efforts!

[Click here to here to make a 2021-22 AF gift](#)

## Reunion 2022 is Approaching!

SHA classes ending in 2's and 7's - do you have Saturday, September 17 blocked on your calendar? Don't miss out on reconnecting with your classmates and touring campus, lunch under a beautiful tent, Excelsior wine and SHARitas! To get a visual of just how great this day will be, check out photos from last year's Reunion [here](#).

Registration is live – [click here](#) to secure your spot!

## Alumnae Spotlight: Swathi Jacob '19

Swathi recently graduated from RIT (Class of 2022) and will be entering the MD/MBA program at SUNY Upstate Medical University (Class of 2027) and Whitman School of Business at Syracuse University (Class of 2023). This unique program will allow her to complete her MBA within 1 year and matriculate into medical school the following year.

**How did SHA prepare you for college and beyond?**

One of the biggest lessons I learned at SHA was the meaning of determination and "grit". The academic rigor, as well as the life lessons I learned in high school, taught me the importance of never giving up. SHA faculty reminded me that there was always someone there who believed in me.



**What has your path been like since graduation?**

A month after my senior year at SHA, I was accepted into the SUNY Upstate Accelerated Scholars program with RIT. This program secured my seat at SUNY Upstate Medical University, meaning I was lucky enough to not have to write the MCAT or go through the medical application process. Additionally, I completed an internship at Harvard's hospital in immunology, become a political affair intern, and pursued research in the public policy response of COVID-19 in the U.S. and was recently named a Fulbright Alternate for the UK Study Scholarship. I am grateful to have had support in college and professors who challenged me to continue to *Reach Higher*.

**What advice would you give a SHA student today?**

Take the risk and apply for the opportunity! The worst thing that can happen is one rejection letter. When I look at all my greatest achievements, starting with my college acceptances, they were all taken with a huge leap of faith and a bit of luck.

**Why do you stay connected and support SHA?**

I stay connected to SHA because there are so many faculty members who have supported me throughout my years at SHA and continue to support me today. They continue to be my biggest cheerleaders whenever I encounter a new milestone or achievement and help me to remember how much I have grown since I have graduated.

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