

QUINTESSENTIAL PEOPLE®

Honoring MARY HOWARD

WORDS BY LISA STAMOS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA M. BARRETT



That One Person

YOU KNOW EXACTLY who they are. It's not because they seek attention. It's because they are *that one person*. They're that one person who makes it happen day after day, season after season, year after year. They're the head of the dance studio who has taught dance for decades. That football coach who you know cares deeply about you, an average player, as much as he does the star quarterback and entire team. It's the local retailer who knows what you are looking for before you do. That children's choir director who taps you, helping you find your voice. The teacher who nurtures your potential until you see a glimmer in yourself. It's that person who said something at the right moment, only for you to realize much later that it changed your life.

Mary Howard is that one person. She's the one who made you feel a good deal better while dropping your little one off at Saint Anne School for the first time. The one who smiled at you the child, patted you on the head, said hello, saying your name as you entered the building.

Mary recently retired from 30 years in Saint Anne's front office, working as the school secretary and resident angel. Her gift is one of unabashed integrity, of being completely emotionally present—every single day, month, and year—to the staff, parents, and students at Saint Anne School. She's one of the five people you'll meet in heaven.

A BLESSED CAREER

Mary started working at Saint Anne School as a teacher's assistant with before and after school programs and then was hired as secretary. She's worked for three school principals and has been a go-to helper for thousands of students, faculty, parents, and parishioners at the parish.

"Saint Anne works so hard to teach kindness and respect," Mary said. "We try to help build a child's faith, which helps set us apart from other schools. Faith building should start at home. Keep it simple." She is candid, though, when it comes to observations. "Parents rely too much on technology to occupy their kids, and this doesn't build their social skills." She also reports that children would benefit from parents learning how to say 'no,' setting clear boundaries, and teaching respect for others. She encourages parents to know that faculty should be respected as a team that is working for the best interests of their students. "We have smaller classroom sizes, and our teachers love their jobs."

"I would do anything for anyone as Saint Anne School and Church because it means the world to me," Mary said. She and her late husband, Tim Howard, were married at Saint Anne. She joined him in the Catholic faith, and their three sons—Tim, Joe, and Chris—were baptized, received First Communion, and had their Confirmations there. All the boys attended Saint Anne School from kindergarten through 8th grade.

A BARRINGTON NATIVE

Mary was born in Evanston but at age 4, her parents moved to Barrington. Her dad, Jim Michael, was the golf pro for 28 years at Biltmore Country Club. Her mom, Juanita, stayed at home with the children and later worked at the pro shop. Mary attended Barrington schools and is a member of the BHS Class of 1976. "We have a close-knit class, a group of great people,"

Mary said. She attended Illinois State for a year but then left to marry Tim, also a BHS graduate. Fr. Dillon married the couple in 1979.

Now that Mary has retired, she talks about wanting to give back by volunteering. There are three grandchildren to enjoy and one on the way. She'd like to visit Italy and Hawaii, and looks forward to traveling to Yellowstone in the fall. "But I will miss those back-to-school days, seeing the kids so excited to return, and greeting each and every one." And for so many, Mary is that one person they will miss, too.

HERE ARE SOME WORDS THAT OTHERS SHARED ABOUT MARY HOWARD.

Cheryl Grelle, FRIEND

Mary—A Ray of Sunshine. I have known Mary Michael Howard since her grammar school days. Our parents were friends, and her father taught me to play golf. Later, when I married and had children, Mary stepped in as our favorite babysitter. It was then that I really got to know Mary and her heart of gold. My kids adored her as she always found fun things for them to do. She was good at refereeing sibling rivalry and had the patience of a saint. She didn't earn much as a babysitter because she would often spend those dollars on gifts for my kids. Her calling to care for others was also recognized by her peers. During Mary's senior year at Barrington High School, she was elected to the homecoming court. Some years later, Mary married her high school sweetheart and had children of her own. It was now my children's turn to babysit for hers!

Fast forward to the day her son, Timmy, entered kindergarten at Saint Anne School. I had the privilege of being his kindergarten teacher. Next came Joey. Soon after, Saint Anne was hiring a new school secretary, and Mary was hired. She embraced her new calling almost as much as we embraced her! She was pure sunshine to all who came into the school office, even the troublemakers. There were times when she was challenged by hardships of her own, but she continued to put the needs of others at the forefront. She worked tirelessly; often working extra hours with work she brought home, while also acting as caregiver to her family members. She continued to be a source of sunshine.

As Mary retires from her secretarial duties, I have no doubt that she'll continue to radiate yet more sunshine. How about her lucky grandchildren? (I might need to buy them sunglasses!)

Chris, Joey, Timmy Howard, SONS Kim Howard, Olivia Howard, DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW

Mary has made an impact in the community, but for us, her legacy and love starts at home with her family. As a mother to three young boys, and two of us girls who married into the family, we are blessed beyond measure to call Mary "Mom" and "Mother-in-law." She is a bright, fun light for her three granddaughters who range in age from 1 to 3.

When asked for one word to describe Mary, we, as her kids, would say the word "kind." She is loving, funny, always thinking of others, and anyone is blessed to cross paths with her.

She is loved by so many in the community and beyond, and her laugh



is contagious enough so that when we are dining locally at any Barrington restaurant as a family, it is a running joke that we 100% will be introduced to someone new that Mary knows. Her life of service includes taking care of her late husband for over a decade, her family, and her community—a gift to society that many will never be able to accomplish.

Wesley Marshall, STUDENT

I first met Mrs. Howard when I transferred to Saint Anne Catholic School in third grade. She was always at the front door, greeting every student with a warm smile and a word of encouragement as we arrived for the day. Over the years, our relationship grew especially when I reached eighth grade.

Each day, I was assigned to bring any uneaten lunchroom food to the office for donation. From there, I would head out to recess but I always made sure stop and chat with Mrs. Howard. Our conversations could be about anything—big or small—but I looked forward to them every single day.

What I admire most about Mrs. Howard is her contagious positivity. She

always seems to have a smile on her face and an uncanny ability to lift the spirits of everyone around her. If I was having a stressful day at school, she could always make me laugh.

Some of my favorite memories from middle school were spending time with Mrs. Howard during our eighth-grade trip to Washington, D.C., where she was one of our chaperones. We shared plenty of laughs, and she was the first to help me when my spring allergies famously flared up. Another moment I deeply cherish was when she stood beside me as my sponsor for my Confirmation into the Catholic faith. It was a milestone in my life, and I'm grateful she was there to share it with me.

Mrs. Howard always goes above and beyond to support students, families, parishioners, and just about anybody she meets. Her unwavering love for Saint Anne and the Barrington community is unmatched.

Nancy Meehan, FRIEND

At school I have a quote posted over my desk that reads, "The friend given to you by circumstances beyond your control is God's own gift." Mary became my friend when I began teaching at Saint Anne 24 years ago. Little did we know then that some challenging commonalities in our lives would draw us so close that she became more family than friend. She has been a great blessing in my personal life and a joy to work with, as well.

Through the years we have worked together, I can't tell you how many school families have told me that "Mrs. Howard was the first person we met when we came to Saint Anne, and she is the reason we stayed." Mary touches your heart with her warmth, sincerity, and humor. She welcomes families, staff, and students with her whole heart every day. When she stands on the front steps in the morning the line of kids waiting to hug her is endless. She offers them welcome, words of encouragement, and reminders to do their best. They know she believes in them and cares about their outcomes. She shows them her vulnerabilities when she makes mistakes, and this allows them to believe that it's okay for them to make mistakes, as well. Mary's vibrant personality and contagious laughter could brighten even the busiest school day, and watching the way she connected with people, I learned lessons no textbook could teach. Yet, in her endearing humility, she often insisted she wasn't as wise as a teacher, though to me, she was one of the best teachers I've ever had.

Mary and I, and our friend Pat, have seen each other through the illnesses and passing of each of our husbands. We are a small support group that no one ever wants to join. Through these losses Mary has held herself with grace, dignity, and the selfless love she gives to everyone. In my life, Mary has indeed been "God's own gift."

Sophia Shirk, FORMER STUDENT

I met Mary Howard when I was 11 years old, during a transitional time in my life as I was moving to a new state. She welcomed me with a smile and a warmth that felt like a hug—offering kindness and compassion at a time when I felt uncertain and out of place. Her presence made me feel seen and accepted, and her efforts helped me truly feel like I belonged to a new community. Mary inspired and encouraged me throughout my pre-teen years, leaving a lasting impression that helped shape the person I would become.

Later, after moving to California for high school, I often found myself thinking of Mary. Whenever I lacked motivation, her can-do attitude and

infectious encouragement would come to mind. Her influence pushed me to engage more with my community and reminded me that even small acts of kindness can make a big difference. When I became an upperclassman, I made a conscious effort to support and connect with younger students—just as Mary had done for me. She had a remarkable way of making each student feel like an essential part of something bigger, and that's something I'll always carry with me. Now, with a bit more perspective, I realize just how profoundly Mary Howard shaped my life. Her compassion, encouragement, and belief in others helped mold me into the person I am today—and I hope to continue paying that forward.


Fr. Joji Thanugundla, PASTOR AT SAINT MARY OF THE ANNUNCIATION, MUNDELEIN

Mary Howard is truly a dedicated person to Saint Anne School community. I have known her since 2016 when I came to Saint Anne parish. I used to visit the school every day and sometimes twice a day. As I walk into the office, I see Mary Howard glued to the computer finishing her tasks. She welcomes me every time with a great smile. Her office space is filled with million sticky notes she needs to respond and attend to. Despite all that, she goes above and beyond to care for the children. She knows every student's name and their parents. She is very kind and compassionate. She is an inspiration of dedication and commitment. May God bless her with health, happiness, and joy that she deserves in her retirement. I am grateful to know her and her family.

Fr. John Trout, PASTOR AT SAINT ANNE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

Mary Howard, the heart of Saint Anne Catholic School, left an indelible mark on our community. Her embodiment of love and faith was not just a concept, but a daily practice. Each morning, she greeted every student by name, often with a warm hug, a gentle tap on the head, or a special handshake. Her genuine interest in their lives made a lasting impact, a legacy that continues to influence our community. The joy on their faces whenever she inquired about important sports games, family events, or exciting trips is a testament to her lasting influence.

Mary was not just a figure for the students, but also a source of comfort for parents. Her familiar and friendly presence in the front office eased the anxiety of leaving their preschoolers for the first time. Parents found solace in knowing that their children had someone like Mary looking out for them throughout the day.

Mary Howard, a true embodiment of the values of her Catholic faith, lived her faith every single day through her kindness, compassion, and service to others. Her selfless service, her irreplaceable presence at Saint Anne, and her profound impact on countless children and parents alike, make her truly one of a kind. She leaves behind a legacy of love and faith that will continue to inspire our community for years to come. 



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