



## An Open Letter to Our Parents

### “A Second Home”

By **Isabella Hsu ('18)**

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am writing this in our dorm kitchen. We're waiting for a pot of soup to boil. Siena is sitting on the ground strumming her uke; Gabby is singing and playing guitar next to me. I'm listening and looking out the window up at the last beams of light on the hillside. What a gift it is to have found a second home.

Four years ago things were so different. Then, Thomas Aquinas College was anything but home. Mom, you were driving us up Ojai Road to a school we knew nothing about, and we were all against you. I remember looking it up when we were pulling into the parking lot, “No textbooks? Dress code? *Catholic?*” The words were foreign and frightening for all of us. Our secular, California public education had never presented us with anything like TAC; but, at the same time, it had left each of us with a deep hunger for more — for something substantial, for something true.

Now, years later, we've discussed that moment with one another time and again. Each one of us was struck. We got out of the car and gazed up at Mary from her place atop the Chapel, surveying the whole campus. It could have been the summer heat that made us swoon, or maybe it was something else. We had no idea of the significance of this, our first meeting.

Needless to say, the drive home was markedly different. We — and you, I think — were in love.

Dad, you might not have been there with us, but you were as much in love with the school as we were after our tour. You carried the news of it to everyone you knew. Even though peers and high school counselors balked at our choice of a tiny, private, non-specialized college, you never once made us feel doubtful of our choices.

We were all struck by how wholeheartedly — and quickly — you embraced the school we were all starting to love ourselves.

As we've progressed through the program, that love has only increased. Siena and I are starting — with much excitement and many late-night conversations — to think of thesis topics for our upcoming Senior Year. Gabby has made it through Kepler and Ptolemy and is reading and re-reading everything with her usual voracity. I have found much consolation in reading St. Thomas Aquinas this year. Surprisingly I read it in *Latin* — I know, who would have thought? His insights on God have piqued my imagination and understanding and deepened my love.

These past few years I've seen profound changes in my life. I've found deeper peace, so much gratitude that I don't know what to do with it, and possibly the greatest fruit of this education: a delight in wisdom, although I make no claim to possess it.

We're so grateful to share our lives with you with every weekly phone call and the occasional surprise visit home. What a joy it is to share both the parts of us you've known and nurtured for 20 years, and those parts we're only now beginning to know ourselves. You've been there equally for the stress-filled phone conversations at 12:00 a.m. as for those filled with excitement — and possibly lots of philosophical jargon as well. And most impressive of all, you've enjoyed every minute.

You two don't just support us, but you take joy with us in all we experience here.



*Gabby ('19), Isabella ('18), and  
Siena ('18) Hsu*

With love and gratitude,

# “God is Doing a Really Great Thing Here”

## Parents Joanne & David Dowdy on their 30-Year Relationship with the College’s Planned New England Campus

**O**n May 2 the National Christian Foundation (NCF) donated to Thomas Aquinas College the gift of a campus in Northfield, Massachusetts. It’s a property that Joanne and David Dowdy, parents of Will (’05), know well. For 35 years Mr. Dowdy has taught at the Northfield Mount Hermon School, which, from 1971 to 2005, operated on two century-old campuses, one of them the Northfield site. Indeed, it was from Mr. Dowdy that College officials first learned of the campus’ availability.

In the following interview these TAC parents share their thoughts about the future of Thomas Aquinas College in New England and the role they have played in helping it to come about.

### **Q: Could you please tell us about your history with Northfield, Massachusetts?**

**Mr. Dowdy:** We came on the faculty here at Northfield Mount Hermon School in the summer of 1982, and for our first two years lived on the Northfield campus that now belongs to Thomas Aquinas College. I had my first class in Stone Hall there. I have been an English teacher here for 35 years, and I’m also the faculty advisor for Catholic students. Up until 2005 faculty and students were going back and forth several times a day between the two campuses, depending on class location, sports practice, department meetings, and so forth. So I spent some 23 years working on that campus.

**Mrs. Dowdy:** When you go to the vacant Northfield campus today, it’s hard to imagine how alive it was when the school was still there. It was a hopping place, beautiful and really energetic. Northfield Mount Hermon has such a great community, and it was a lively part of the whole neighborhood in Northfield. I think that’s why the community is excited now about the College’s acquiring that property. They’ve missed that liveliness, that life on the campus.

As soon as it was announced that the NCF would be giving the campus to TAC, everyone looked the College up. Everything we heard was that people were pleased. They looked at pictures of the California campus and said, “Oh, OK, they know how to take care of a campus. Phew!”

**Mr. Dowdy:** That’s important. People are concerned about holding on to the beauty of the campus and not letting these old, esteemed buildings deteriorate. So seeing the California campus has been really important for people.



### **Q: And what is your history with Thomas Aquinas College?**

**Mrs. Dowdy:** We came into the Catholic Church in 1995. Around that time we started reading Catholic publications and talking with people in Catholic education, and the name TAC kept coming up. Then, about five years later, when our oldest son, Will, was getting into the upper years of his high school, we started looking into colleges. In 2000 the College’s president at the time, Dr. Tom Dillon, came out here to give a presentation at Will’s school. That’s when Will got the vision for it.

**Mr. Dowdy:** Will had some good opportunities at Columbia and the University of Chicago, but he came out to TAC for a three-day visit, sat in on some classes, and was completely enamored of the fervor of the students, who took the discussions from the classroom to the lunch room to the playing fields to the dorm. And he thought, “This is the kind of engagement I’m looking for,” more than he found at the big-name schools. We also were very taken with the school, the people, the students, the classes, and the beauty of the campus.

**Mrs. Dowdy:** He had four very good years and graduated in 2005. He also met his wife there, and we’re so grateful to the College for that! We admire our daughter-in-law, Erin (Sale ’05), for how she reflects her TAC education in her life. It is their experience, our sharing in their education, and the friends they made at TAC, that make us enthusiastic about the possibility of the College opening a campus here.

### **Q: What role did you play in helping to make this opportunity possible?**

**Mr. Dowdy:** We went out for Will's graduation in 2005, the year Northfield Mount Hermon closed the Northfield campus. In talking with Admissions Director Jon Daly — who is our son's brother-in-law — I said, "Jon, I've got a proposition for you: What would you think about opening a second campus out East, because we don't have a great books Catholic education available to us back there?" But at that time there was a price tag on the campus, around \$60 million, so Jon looked at me like, "Well, I'll mention it to the president, but that's probably not going to happen." And I knew it was a long shot.

When our daughter was looking at colleges in 2014, we were on the phone with Jon, and I said, "Well that campus is still available, but now the price tag is much better. It's free, fully furnished, and the NCF is looking for someone to give it to. What do you think?" He said, "Well *that's* more interesting." He said he would take it to President McLean and talk it over.

**Q: So you're the one who made this happen?**

**Mr. Dowdy:** I would say that the Holy Spirit did!

Northfield Mount Hermon has always been supported invisibly by a group of people with powerful prayers. There are a lot of people in this area who feel a very strong connection to the school's founder, D.L. Moody. They have been praying for his campuses, his schools, throughout all these long years.

There have been people who have been coming to the campus weekly for 30 years, making prayer walks around the grounds, praying for God to, in a sense, restore the campus to its Christian foundation. So when TAC was announced, folks thought, "Finally! Thirty-five or forty years of praying are now bearing fruit and bringing a genuine Christian endeavor here!"

I won't pretend *all* those people are excited about a Catholic college, but many are. There's the general public, people in town who are obviously hoping to have somebody back on the campus; but there's also this other more silent, more hidden group of people who are looking at it as a possible answer to very fervent prayers over a very long time.

**Mrs. Dowdy:** I recently operated a table for the College at a Catholic men's conference in our diocese, and people were so interested in it. There's a lot of anticipation of what it could do for our diocese and for this area.

**Q: What was your own reaction to this news?**

**Mrs. Dowdy:** Oh, wonderful! My goodness! We were so excited!

**Mr. Dowdy:** In May or June of 2015, President Mike McLean and Vice President Paul O'Reilly came out here to look over the property. We met with them, and that's when I got really excited. From early on, way back in 2005, I had thought, "This is the perfect solution to this empty campus." I still think it's almost too good to be true. It's just such a great



fit. My time here, my love for the Catholic faith, my love for education — the kind of education you're doing — it just all pulls together.

**Mrs. Dowdy:** One of the things that was such a great joy was to have the NCF say to us that they didn't think they could have found a better match for the campus than TAC. That was wonderful to hear.

**Q: Would you say that the cooperation of the NCF and the College — and the establishment of this Catholic institution on a campus founded by a Protestant minister — are signs of a healthy ecumenism at work?**

**Mr. Dowdy:** There is a growing sense in this area that Protestants and Catholics don't have the luxury of being too suspicious of each other because, in some ways, we have to hold together. The Northeast is a notoriously difficult place. We're saturated with educational institutions, we have a long and colorful history, and we're fiercely independent. So the fact that Christians can recognize each other across the divide has been an important part of the experience here for a lot of people.

**Mrs. Dowdy:** God is doing a really great thing here. It kind of takes our breath away. It's just amazing. Thomas Aquinas College is right in the middle of it. All these wonderful things, and all those buildings waiting to be studied in again! What we can tell you from being here is that it's a blessing to be on this campus and in those buildings. The classrooms are wonderful. The music hall is a beautiful building. The chapel, too. It's an amazing, wonderful thing to have them all be given to TAC for the study that goes on there.

*Note: Contingent upon the approval of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, Thomas Aquinas College's New England campus will open its doors to students in the fall of 2018. For up-to-the minute news about the College's eastward expansion, or to receive email updates, see [thomasaquinas.edu/newengland](http://thomasaquinas.edu/newengland).*



# Campus Life

## Chez Martin



An end-of-the-year, outdoor dance, Chez Martin has become one of Thomas Aquinas College's most popular annual events. Put on by members of the Senior Class, it is a relaxed occasion for the seniors to say goodbye to the underclassmen. It also serves as a fundraiser, with proceeds going toward the seniors' farewell gift to the College.

## Chrysostomos Concert



On Palm Sunday, Chrysostomos, a student choir directed by Theresa Donnelly ('17), performed its spring concert in St. Bernardine of Siena Library.

## Rejuniorate

At the midpoint of the spring semester, members of the Class of 2018 took to the Ventura beach for an event they dubbed "Rejuniorate." Organizers define the term, originally coined by the Class of 2014, as "a renewal of spirits that are wearied due to two weekly seminars and an overload of Newton" and "a time to relax and reminisce with one's classmates of the last 2½ years."



## Walk for Life

After the close of classes on Friday, January 20, some 260 Thomas Aquinas College students departed for San Francisco and the Walk for Life West Coast. At the request of the Walk's organizers, they once again took on volunteer positions, directing traffic and crowds, as they helped lead the way through the streets of San Francisco. Clad in their grey TAC sweatshirts, all prayed, sang, and peacefully called for an end to abortion alongside more than 50,000 fellow walkers.







## Much Ado About Nothing



On Saturday, March 4, the St. Genesius Players treated Thomas Aquinas College students, faculty, and families to a production of William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Directors of the production were Zoe Appleby ('18) and Benjamin Trull ('19); lead performers were Jack Murphy ('19) as Benedick, Caroline Guinee ('19) as Beatrice, Andreas Waldstein ('19) as Claudio, and Rosalie Simoneau ('17) as Hero.

## "Chariots of Fire" Quad Run



Inspired by a classic scene from *Chariots of Fire* — in which Harold Abrahams successfully completes Cambridge University's Trinity Great Court Run before the King's Gate Clock strikes 12 — the students of Thomas Aquinas College staged their own, now-annual quad run in early April. The top runner was freshman Isaiah Brittain, who set a course record with a time of 38.56 seconds, followed by sophomore Michael Johnson (39.40) and junior Kevin Eubanks (40.31).

# Tested & True

## Alumni Professionals Offer Advice at Career Strategies Workshop

**“Y**ou’ve probably heard these arguments before,” **Shane O’Reilly** (’95), told a group of Thomas Aquinas College students at a March 26 Career Strategies Workshop. “You know, that TAC prepares you best for being able to succeed in whatever endeavor you pursue because it teaches you to think, etc. Truthfully, when I graduated from TAC, I wasn’t sure I believed that. And, as an employer, I wasn’t really sure that it was true, either.”

“So I tested it,” he continued.

The vice president for strategic sourcing at Anthem Insurance Companies, Mr. O’Reilly began recruiting at his alma mater about five years ago. “It turns out, it’s true,” he remarks. “There’s something about this education and what it breeds in you people that doesn’t happen in other places. I really want you to know that you’ve got something special, and I see it not just because I was a student here and I would like it to be true, but because there are now five TAC graduates working at Anthem in our group.”



Mr. O’Reilly was one of three speakers at the Sunday-afternoon event, organized by the College’s Office of Career Advisement. The workshop focused on job discernment, networking, résumé- and cover-letter writing, and interview preparation. Joining Mr. O’Reilly were two fellow graduates of the College who shared their wisdom about the benefits of a Catholic liberal education in the marketplace.

After opening the discussion by recounting how he entered the business world directly from Thomas Aquinas College, Mr. O’Reilly offered insights into how students can best describe their liberal education to prospective employers. “All the things that you people are reading — they are original works that most people feel are way past their ability even to understand,” he said. “So there’s a real way in which you can sell yourself in those environments, and you come across as something really special if you do it the right way.”

Next, **Sharon (Raskob ’99) Reiser**, the College’s director of foundation relations, discussed her previous work as a grant reviewer for a philanthropic foundation, likening the experience to the way recruiters quickly evaluate résumés and cover letters. “The cover letter looks like it’s about



you,” Mrs. Reiser began. “It’s not. It’s about them. It’s about, ‘This is your problem. I have a solution to it.’”

A good cover letter, she explained, will quickly catch the reviewer’s eye, highlighting a detail that will allow the applicant to stand apart from all others.

“The College is your hook,” she said. “The College is a little bit different. It’s something interesting. This is not something that they have read 1,000 times before.” Mentioning one’s experience with the Discussion Method, she observed, is particularly useful. “The subtext is: I play well with others, which is huge, because what they are really looking for is someone who is not going to showboat, who is going to come in to the corporate culture, be able to work with a lot of different personalities, and be helpful to the whole process.”

The last panelist was the College’s director of student services, **Mark Kretschmer** (’99), who, prior to coming to work for his alma mater, was the youngest branch manager for Kinko’s, Inc., in the Los Angeles market. Mr. Kretschmer initially focused on discerning the right career path, then offered suggestions for successful job interviews.

“The key is marketing,” he said. “Getting a great job is a marketing campaign. You have to be able to effectively sell



your skills and your unique education.” A degree from Thomas Aquinas College, Mr. Kretschmer added, points to several skill sets that all employers seek.

### Spring Career Advisement Events

#### Special Education:

Margaret Walsh (’15), founder of Courageous Concepts

**Law:** Tim Cantu (’10), attorney at Pepple Cantu Schmidt PLLC

**Information Technology & Cybersecurity:** Ken May (’03), CEO and owner of Swift Chip

**Business:** Daniel Pierson, MBA (’04), small-business underwriter at Colorado Business Bank

**Architecture:** Anthony Grumbine (’00), design associate, Harrison Design





# “Little Philanthropy”

## Anonymous Parent Gift Replenishes College’s Natural Science Labs

“One of the things that distinguishes our academic program from many of the other orthodox Catholic colleges is that every student here studies math and natural science, for all four years, in great detail,” says Dr. John J. Goyette, a tutor and Thomas Aquinas College’s next dean.

“That is very important in order to think critically about some of the presuppositions that the modern world tends to adopt — such as the widespread belief that faith and science, or faith and reason, are incompatible,” he remarks. “To make those judgments in an informed way, you need to be able to think through what modern science actually has to show about the world. And there’s no better way to do that than in the lab, replicating some of the experiments that the original scientists performed, or at least experiments that are close to what the original scientific papers are describing.”

For this reason the College’s curriculum includes a heavy emphasis on laboratory experiments and demonstrations. Whereas at most colleges only a small portion of students — those who major in a few STEM subjects — ever touch any of the laboratory equipment, Thomas Aquinas College must have sufficient technology on hand for every student. “It’s not adequate to have, say, one student doing an experiment while five classmates stand around and watch,” says Mr. Goyette. “For students to have truly firsthand experience, there must be enough equipment that they can work in small groups, usually in pairs.”

The problem is that laboratory equipment is expensive and, for years, as the College’s student body and financial-aid needs grew, the laboratory budget was unable to keep pace. Over time, equipment aged or broke, while the number of students making use of that equipment increased.

“It became more difficult to conduct our experiments,” says Dr. Goyette. “The results were less reliable. Students were compelled to share more than is ideal.”

Until some thoughtful parents intervened.

“Last year, a student noticed that we were making do with less,” recalls Dr. Goyette. “When the student’s parents heard about it, they replied quickly and generously, contributing funds that allowed us to make some long-delayed purchases.”

These parents have asked to remain anonymous, but they are happy to share why they



chose to support Thomas Aquinas College in this way. “In our financial giving to the College, we had always focused on supporting the financial needs of students or capital campaigns, which also tend to be the focus of major philanthropic support,” says the student’s father. “But it occurred to us that there might be a giving gap, if you will, an opening for ‘little philanthropy’ to target some special needs, such as updating lab equipment, that would otherwise fall through the cracks of giving intentions. So we started a series of annual donations targeted to this particular need.”

These donations have done a world of good for the College’s natural science program. “I have been able to buy several laboratory scales, a high-quality Newton’s Cradle, a vacuum plate and bell jar, a new wave-demonstration machine, and various other items at a great discount,” says Dr. Goyette, who oversees the laboratories. “We have been able to give our labs a much-needed upgrade.”

Such acts of generosity, says Parents’ Association Coordinator Robert Bagdazian, exemplify the many ways that TAC parents consistently assist not only their own children, but all of the College’s students. “Parents have a window into the life of the College that allows them to perceive needs and respond to them,” he says. “I am constantly amazed at how they are always looking for ways to help. Their ‘little philanthropy’ has played an enormous role in the life and success of Thomas Aquinas College.”

“Parents have a window into the life of the College that allows them to perceive needs and respond to them.”



# Parents' Corner

## Son Knows Best

by Laura and Tim Ristoff

As parents of young adults about to enter college, we often think we know what is best for our children. In our family, we definitely thought we knew what was best for our eldest son, Brandon. He would attend a well-known college, pursue a degree in engineering or business, and then move on to get his master's degree. As parents, we had it all planned — except this was not Brandon's plan.

Late in his junior year, as Brandon was walking across his high school campus, he noticed a fellow student in a Thomas Aquinas College sweatshirt, and the two struck up a conversation. The student described the College and its curriculum, and immediately Brandon was intrigued. He soon began a mission to learn as much as possible about the College. He pored over the website, read the college-guide reviews, and began to imagine himself attending this school that was so very different from what we had had in mind.

We initially pushed back: What would be his career path if he earned a liberal arts degree? What would he be giving up if he did not attend a "big name" school?

As summer approached we agreed that a campus visit was necessary. Much to our chagrin, as soon as he set foot upon the campus, he loved Thomas Aquinas College even more. You might even say he became *obsessed* with it. For the next several months, TAC was all that he would talk about.

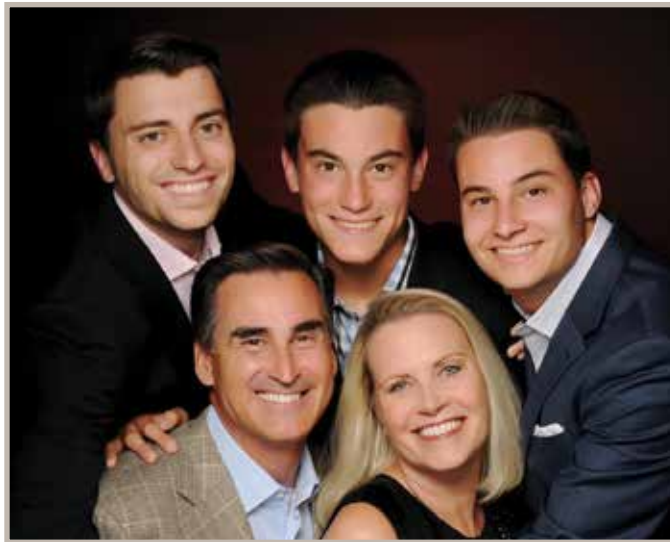
Trying to be good, open-minded parents, we established some ground rules before a decision could be made. First, Brandon needed to sit in on some classes to *really* understand what the Discussion Method of teaching encompassed. Second, he needed to research the potential careers that would be open to him post-TAC.

Brandon made an appointment to come back to the campus in October, when school was in session, so as to observe a few classes — and his desire to attend the College only got stronger. Meanwhile, we also came to learn more about the College, and what we learned did much to relieve our anxieties.

When we mentioned TAC to friends, we were surprised and impressed with their knowledge and support for the College. We soon discovered the outstanding advantages of a liberal education — strong analytical and communication skills, plus the ability to look at ideas from different positions — and we were impressed by Thomas Aquinas College's unwavering commitment to our Catholic faith.

It soon became obvious that our son knew best!

Over the past four years Brandon has grown. He has become



Laura and Tim Ristoff with their sons, Brandon ('17), Grant, and Cole

a deeper thinker, interested in learning and understanding different perspectives, and always wondering about the world around him. When he was in high school, he was often single-minded in thought and often not very flexible with regards to differing viewpoints. The College has encouraged within him a broader search for knowledge, truth, and understanding.

That search has led Brandon to Pepperdine University, where, starting next fall, he will work to earn a master's degree in public policy. With the great education and faith-filled community provided by Thomas Aquinas College, our son now understands his mission in life: to go out into the world and make it a better place, and to always do God's work, no matter where and how He calls you.

Watching Brandon's growth has even changed the way we choose employees for our consulting firm. Whereas we used to hire only candidates with engineering or financial degrees, we have recently begun to hire young men and women with a liberal arts background. We have come to see that liberally educated workers — who can ask questions, think critically, discuss matters intelligently, and write effectively — make for some of the best employees.

We are very proud of our son's decision to attend Thomas Aquinas College, and we are grateful to all the faculty, staff, and benefactors that have made this college such a great institution.

**“Watching Brandon's growth has even changed the way we choose employees for our consulting firm.”**