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National Gonzaga Day reminds us of our common blessing

Zags across the United States, as well as in Calgary and Tokyo, united Jan. 24 for the first National Gonzaga Day and celebrated everything good about Gonzaga. Alumni from 32 cities participated in service projects, collecting food, coats, blankets and diapers for those in need. Standing at center court in the McCarthey Athletic Center at halftime of the GU-BYU men’s basketball game, Gonzaga President Thayne McCulloh shared news of a major gift commitment that could launch construction on a new University Center later this year, pending Board approval and continued successful fundraising.

President McCulloh thanked Gonzaga’s many contributors and said that plans for this center are just the beginning of a tremendous transformation that will take place at Gonzaga over the next several years as the University builds on its national reputation for academics, athletics, leadership and student engagement. The halftime presentation may be seen at NationalGonzagaDay.org. It has been viewed online more than 3,000 times.

More than 2,300 Zags gathered for National Gonzaga Day parties from Honolulu to Florida, including 700 at the Spokane Convention Center. The alumni and friends who gathered in the Big Apple gave a halftime shout-out to the president and others, saying “Live from New York, it’s National Gonzaga Day.” Add 6,000 fans in the Kennel, and 34 staff and faculty members who visited gatherings across the country, and the Gonzaga family sharing the Zag Spirit was momentous that night.

Alumni Director Bob Finn was in Denver for the big day and said many parents commented on their happiness with what Gonzaga offers their children. “And I heard numerous comments from other patrons at the event on how they wish their own universities would do something similar.”

Associate Alumni Director Kara Hertz was in Portland, where many parents tried to find their Kennel Club kids – who performed an outstanding “card stunt” – during the halftime show broadcast live over the web. “It was our sixth alumni chapter event in Portland this month, and we still had 120 Zags show up. In New York, those Zags arrived at 7 p.m. Eastern Time and most stayed until game’s end around 2 a.m. That’s dedication,” Hertz said, adding that people tuned in online to the halftime presentation from around the globe, “and the requests to start new alumni chapters are flowing in.”

The evening ended with fireworks over Lake Arthur, which unsettled some neighbors. But the sound of Zag Nation uniting went far beyond the city’s borders.

Check out Facebook.com/gonzagauniversity for NGD updates and photo submissions from around the nation.
Faculty explore steps to achieve excellence

Ten faculty spoke candidly and passionately to their peers at the Spring Faculty Conference about moving Gonzaga from good to excellent. Several voiced the desire to see a stronger intellectual community emerge among students on campus.

“Until students begin to see themselves as members of an intellectual community” and “see themselves as scholars with ideas worth discussion,” Gonzaga cannot call itself an excellent university, said John Traynor, associate professor of English. She spoke of her hopes that within five years, an intellectual community will emerge among students. “Imagine students in tents for Jess Walter. Imagine a Kennel Club for Jane Goodall.”

Another repeated theme among speakers was interdisciplinary teaching – either interdepartmentally or through programs that draw from both the professional schools and the College of Arts and Sciences. Interdisciplinary education helps students see connections, and it models the real world, said Sue Niezgoda, assistant professor of engineering. African studies is one such program that would make sense for Gonzaga, she added.

“There are no princes of learning,” said Pat McCormick, professor of religious studies. “There are only communities of learning.”

Student research and scholarship came up repeatedly. Research projects that originate through students’ interests and conclude with presentations at scholarly conferences help our students “transition from students to scholars, from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge,” offered Vik Gumbhir, associate professor of sociology. Gumbhir emphasized the emotional support necessary in mentoring student research, as well as the funding needed to support such logistical needs as conference travel expenses. Other faculty voiced a desire to see their students take their work beyond the Spokane Intercollegiate Regional Conference.

Several faculty expressed a desire for deeper community, whether through interdepartmental book groups, a faculty lounge, or team teaching. More support for new faculty, including a faculty mentoring program and networking opportunities were proposed by Sue Niezgoda, assistant professor of engineering.

Finally, President Thayne McCulloh urged faculty to do more “to push and to stretch our students so that they can understand their potential.”

Fr. Case discusses his work with Jesuits in Rome

As U.S. regional assistant at the Curia (1990-2005), and as general secretary of the Society of Jesus (2005-08) in Rome, Father Frank Case, S.J., saw firsthand how the close-knit organization approaches its dynamic global mission. Father Case discusses his experiences and insights, and gives an up-close look at the organization when he addresses the Greater Gonzaga Guild at 10:30 a.m., Feb. 26, in the Herak Club Room, McCarthey Athletic Center. No charge. All welcome.
FOCUS ON … Brian Steverson embraces Jesuitization

Brian Steverson will argue that to the extent that business schools are responsible for moral failures of business, the solution is to “Jesuitize” all business education. After all, he’s had some experience with it.

Steverson came to Gonzaga in 1992, taught philosophy here for 16 years, then became the John L. Aram Chair of Business Ethics. On the occasion of the University’s 125th anniversary, Steverson will deliver the Aram Lecture Feb. 13, 6:30 p.m. in Cataldo Hall on the subject, “Business Ethics Education as Transformative: The Jesuit Tradition.” He will explore the ongoing financial crisis that began in 2007 and the role that America’s schools of business might play in preventing a similar calamity. Business schools, especially master of business administration programs, have scrambled the past three years to revise curricula and missions to address this failure, Steverson says.

Steverson said he never consciously chose “teaching” as his career. “I suppose I knew when I headed off to graduate school in 1984 that I would more likely than not end up a college professor, but for some odd reason that was never something I focused on. I started teaching as a graduate assistant in 1986 and it turned out it was something I was good at and felt “right” doing. I guess you could say that teaching found me.”

When he’s not in the classroom he likes to run and play the ponies. “Oh, I almost forgot, and spend as much time as possible with my lovely wife, and the brightest spark of the divine I have known, Adriane Leithauser (graduate alumni outreach specialist in the business graduate school).”

“It’s not surprising, knowing his love of the ponies, that “Seabiscuit” is his favorite book. Steverson’s favorite entertainers are Tab Benoit and Anders Osborne, both from New Orleans. Coincidentally, Steverson received his doctorate from Tulane and taught philosophy at Xavier, both in New Orleans, before coming to Gonzaga.

Want to know more Steverson favorites? Favorite movies are “Casablanca,” “Shawshank Redemption,” and “Bull Durham.” Favorite Spokane restaurant is Hugo’s.

New HR leadership reaching out

After 17 years in human resources at Jubilant HollisterStier and five weeks at Gonzaga, Kirk Wood-Gaines has been “drinking from a firehose” of information. The University’s new assistant vice president of human resources, Wood-Gaines took a break recently to introduce himself to Gonzaga’s staff.

“I consider Gonzaga a premier employer. The University’s mission alignment is very important to me,” he said. His goal is to fairly balance the institution’s needs and employees’ needs. “Just because an issue is not resolved publicly doesn’t mean it hasn’t been thoroughly reviewed, investigated and had corrective measures put in place.”

He emphasized a desire for human resources to be transparent, but within limits: “Our commitment to confidentiality has to trump our commitment to transparency.” The same is true of confidentiality and safety, he said. “One of the very few times I’ll consider violating a confidence is when I believe an employee’s safety is at risk.”

Over 30 people took part in the interview process – “I’ve never had so many people interview me for a job,” Wood-Gaines said – and every single one “brought up compensation as an issue that needs to be explored.” He did not say anything more specific beyond the fact that he would start by learning about and evaluating the current compensation system. “It is a priority from Thayne McCulloh to Marty Martin,” he told his audience, adding, “Please have realistic expectations.”
University Center part of Gonzaga’s educational vision

A proposed, major new building, the University Center, signals Gonzaga’s continued transformation into the 21st century. President McCulloh shared the University’s vision for the building on National Gonzaga Day, Jan. 24, as well as news of a major gift commitment directed toward it construction. Dr. McCulloh gave faculty and staff the scoop on this announcement in his Spring Faculty Conference and Spring Staff Assembly address, respectively.

Design for the projected $51 million Center brings together academic, social and faith components, as well as varied dining options. At an estimated 165,000 square feet over four levels, the center will be one of the largest buildings on campus.

The proposed Center will replace Gonzaga’s COG and the COG parking lot. If fund-raising work is successful and if the Trustees give approval, construction could begin later this year. The four-story Boone Avenue Retail Center under construction between Cincinnati and Hamilton will house an interim dining facility, the new bookstore, parking for 650 vehicles and eventually retail space.

Important features of the new University Center include dining services, a café/pub, many meeting spaces, administrative offices for CCASL, Gonzaga Outdoors and other student services, the new Center for Global Engagement, University Ministry, and a ballroom.

Its design will reflect emphases in digital literacy, global engagement and environmental sustainability. The building will become a living lab for engineering and other students to learn about strategies for sustainability.

Food on wheels, why not!

Zag Dining Services is simply awaiting final inspection from Labor and Industries before unveiling its new food trailer on campus. Retail Dining Director Dan Harris hopes to have a snappier name for the rig later this spring. But here’s the concept: Park on the plaza off the southeast corner of College Hall. Serve lunch weekdays, with each day featuring something different, i.e. rice bowl with chicken and veggies on Monday, burritos the next, steak sandwich on Wednesday, etc.

“We’ll always have some kind of side, like chips or fruit,” Harris said. “We’d also like to take it to Tent City and plug in there. We can stay open later when events are scheduled on campus.”

Part of the motivation for creating the food trailer is the closing of Spike’s once the COG is razed. “We’ll have a contest this spring to name the trailer,” Harris said. “This could be a lot of fun.” Food may be purchased with Dining Dollars and Bulldogs Bucks, cash and credit cards.

Saint Tekakwitha’s life explored

Gonzaga hosts a conference Feb. 2 in honor of the canonization of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk woman who survived smallpox as a child, vowed to a life of chastity, and whose intercession led to various miracles and supernatural events. She was canonized last fall.

The conference presenters will explore the Jesuits’ encounter with indigenous peoples, Saint Tekakwitha’s legacy, and her influence on people.

Presenters include Father Mike Maher, S.J., Gonzaga Catholic Studies professor; Mark Thiel, archivist for the Catholic Bureau of Indian Affairs at Marquette; and Sister Kateri Mitchell, director of the Kateri Tekakwitha Conference.

To register, please contact Fr. Maher at ext. 6609, or maher@gonzaga.edu. This event is organized by Gonzaga’s Catholic Studies program.