

Elaine Tweedus '66: A Gift in Memory of “Aunt Mary” to Create a New Chapel



When Elaine Tweedus graduated from Caldwell College for Women in 1966, a new VW Bug was going for around \$1,500, the Beatles had four top Billboard singles and Time magazine’s Man of the Year was awarded to the generation 25 and under. The hippie movement was beginning to take hold, and there were massive protests against the Vietnam War and in favor of civil rights and women’s rights. It was a time of new opportunities, a time when education gave women the chance to become trailblazers. Tweedus, a French major, and her classmates graduated and ventured out into a world that offered them not just jobs but careers and a newfound sense of freedom that fueled their dreams. Tweedus says that when she read “The Feminine Mystique” by Betty Friedan, a light went on.

Looking back on her journey more than fifty years later, Tweedus says she is grateful for the ways in which her Caldwell education shaped her life. Her appreciation and desire to give back inspired a transformational gift of \$500,000 to Caldwell to build a new chapel in the Newman Center in memory of her Aunt Mary, a Sister of Saint Dominic of Caldwell.

A product of 16 years of Dominican education, Tweedus says she is blessed to have been taught by excellent, nurturing faculty at Caldwell and to have been guided by Dominican values throughout her life. In light of her career and personal success, she is emphatic in her belief that

“Education is one of the best investments anyone can make.”

As a new graduate, Tweedus was hired by Prudential for a position in legal research. Her work ethic and discipline earned her high marks with her supervisors; she rose through the management ranks and eventually became director and corporate officer, the position from which she retired in 2015. She says it was rewarding to witness how her work benefited the company while educating consumers about the importance of making sound financial choices.

Earlier this year Tweedus and her husband, Ed Lonyai, pledged a gift designated for the new campus chapel, which will be named in memory of Elaine’s aunt, Sister Mary Dominic Tweedus, who devoted her life to the Dominican community, serving it for 67 years.

Tweedus and Lonyai envision the new chapel as a sacred space for meditation that encourages prayer and reflection—a place where students and the rest of the campus community can find respite from the pressures of daily life. Their investment will enhance the student experience at Caldwell for generations to come.

Tweedus recalls the year or so when her aunt lived at the Motherhouse on campus. “Aunt Mary was my father’s sister. On Sunday afternoons my father would drive my mother, my brothers and me to Caldwell to visit with Aunt Mary. I

remember my brothers and I playing tag on the lawn of the Motherhouse. It seems like I had a connection to Caldwell long before I began my college days there,” says Tweedus. She believes her aunt will “be looking down on and offering (the students) insight and advice, as she did for me.”

As one driven to make a difference, Tweedus is active in her community. She spent a number of years volunteering with the Boy Scouts of America. Since her retirement, she has become involved with the Woodbridge River Watch, the Historical Association of Woodbridge Township and the Barron Arts Center in Woodbridge. She is a certified advocate for the New Jersey Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman and works with veterans to help them better understand complex veterans’ benefits. She is an

antiques enthusiast, a collector of Chinese porcelain and a world traveler. Now that she has more time for herself, Tweedus is pursuing her love of writing and her lifelong dream of becoming a novelist; she is working on a mystery novel.

Tweedus and Lonyai look forward to the day when the new chapel will open and they can celebrate their memories of Sister Mary Dominic Tweedus in a place named for her in perpetuity. ■

—Christina Hall

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