



Alumni Association

The ECHO

St. John's College Alumni Newsletter

SPRING 2026

1886 + 2026

What's Inside

Chancellor's message	2
Banquet information	2
Dean's message	3
2025 Graduates	4
College happenings	5
Class of 1976	6
Distinguished alumn	6
College news	7
Parade information	7

140 YEARS

OF NURSING EXCELLENCE



Greetings to all,

I hope that this publication finds you well. I am looking forward to the Alumni Banquet in October. This year is the 140th anniversary of the beginning of the St. John's Hospital Training School. If you are interested in a travel through time, the first textbook, "The Nursing Sister. St. John's Hospital Training School. A Manual for Candidates and Novices of Hospital Communities" can be purchased on Amazon. It was first published in 1899 by H. W. Booker Co. Printers and Binders. Our school has undergone many changes in the past 140 years. We should all have pride in knowing that our alma mater is the oldest Catholic hospital-based nursing school in the United States.

The 2026 Distinguished Alumni Award recipient is Mary Catherine (Allen) DeGroot class of 1965. She was nominated by H. Catherine (Nolan) Miller class of 1970. I had the privilege of having Mary Kay as my first clinical instructor.

As some of you know I began teaching at the college in 2009. I made the decision to retire in 2024 when HSHS made changes to the defined pension. I am currently an adjunct faculty member, doing mostly clinical for first semester students as well as maternal/child. This allows me to spend more time with family. Unbelievably, I have five grandchildren, ages 1 to almost 19 years. So, they are babies to middle, high school, and college students. I'm not sure how time has passed both slowly, and at the same time, quickly.

This will be my last letter as Alumni Board President. I have made the decision to step down from the board. The Alumni Board is always looking for new members; if you are interested, there is a link on the college webpage.

Respectfully,
Linda L. Blakley, DNP, RN
Class of 1982





A MESSAGE FROM THE *Chancellor*

Greetings, St. John's College alumni,
I hope this message finds you well. I am delighted to share the 2026 edition of The Echo.

It was a joy to see so many of you at our Alumni and Friends Banquet in October 2025. We were honored to celebrate the 50-year Class of 1975 with a meaningful pinning ceremony. This October, we look forward to recognizing the Class of 1976.

As we look ahead, we celebrate a remarkable milestone, the 140th anniversary of St. John's College of Nursing. On October 4, 1886, the Feast of St. Francis, the founding Sisters, alongside Father Louis Hinssen, established the original nurse training school at St. John's Hospital in Springfield, Illinois. This legacy continues to guide our mission and commitment to excellence in nursing education.

The College continues to demonstrate strong momentum across all programs. Enrollment is steady in our pre-RN licensure BSN program, including the LPN-to-BSN pathway, and strong in our RN-to-BSN program, where approximately 60% of incoming students are HSHS colleagues.

Our MSN program is also growing, with a full cohort representing our HSHS markets across Central and Southern Illinois and Wisconsin.

We are also proud to expand our impact beyond the classroom. Our students have partnered with the Springfield Urban League Head Start program to provide pre-kindergarten physicals, supporting early childhood health in our community. We have also launched the St. John's College Nursing Research Center, led by our Academic Nurse Scientist, Dr. Kelley McGuire, to advance scholarship and strengthen nursing practice across our system.

We are deeply grateful for our alumni community. Your engagement, leadership, and commitment to the profession continue to shape the future of St. John's College of Nursing.

Warm regards,

Dr. Traci Krause

Dr. Traci Krause
Chancellor

You are cordially invited to the

Alumni & Friends Banquet



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2026

Cocktail Hour | 5 p.m.
Dinner | 6 p.m.



PASFIELD HOUSE

525 S. Pasfield St.
Springfield, IL 62704

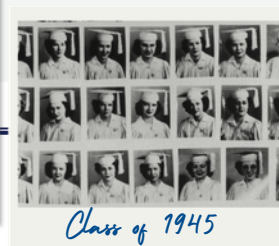
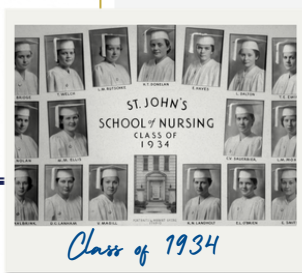
Please direct questions to
sjcsalumni@outlook.com



Join us for an evening of fellowship, remembrance, and celebration of 140 years of nursing education.

TO RSVP, SCAN THE QR CODE
or go to

sjcs.edu/alumnibanquet





A MESSAGE FROM THE

Dean OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Hello Alumni,

As I reflect on the 2025-2026 academic year, I am filled with pride in the continued growth, excellence, and impact of St. John's College of Nursing. This year was marked by a successful ACEN re-accreditation site visit for our baccalaureate program—thank you to the community members, faculty, and staff who contributed to that important work.

Building on strong NCLEX success and program outcomes, this year has been one of continued momentum. We celebrated the Fall 2025 graduating class, including 27 LPN-BSN and seven Accelerated BSN students, who now carry forward the mission and values of the College into practice, leadership, and service.

Student and faculty engagement remained a highlight, including participation in Student Nurse Political Action Day, reflecting our commitment to preparing nurses who advocate for patients, communities, and the profession.

We also recognize Dr. Muyiwa-Oja, recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education Nurse Educator Fellowship Award, and thank our faculty for their continued dedication to student success.

Research and scholarship continue to be central to our academic experience. Through Research Day collaborations and student presentations across programs, our students showcased meaningful work grounded in evidence-based practice.

Our students further expanded their perspectives through participation in the Kenniebrew-McNeese Conference, exploring critical issues in health equity, leadership, and community impact.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to strengthening outcomes, advancing curriculum innovation, and fostering partnerships that enhance student learning and professional development. These accomplishments reflect the dedication of our students and faculty, as well as the continued support of our alumni and community partners.

All my thanks,

Dr. Elaine Hardy, PhD, RN

Dr. Elaine Hardy, PhD, RN
Dean of Academic Affairs



SUPPORTING YOUR ALMA MATER

Your generosity strengthens our mission and shapes the future of nursing.

SCHOLARSHIPS

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

STUDENT SUCCESS

**INVEST IN THE FUTURE.
HONOR THE PAST.**

Your support allows the next generation of nurses to off-set the cost of their education.

WAYS TO GIVE



ONLINE
hshs.org/stjohnscollege/give

EMAIL
amy.friedman@hshs.org



CLASS OF 2025



Adesina, Rachel
Avila-Kobylarczyk, Marycall
Bilyeu, Amanda
Bonilla, Cassandra
Boyd, Roselinda Travis
Camac, Calista
Carter, Bridget
Christopher, William
Cobb, Shunishai
Dicken, Frank
Ellis, Taffyell
Gordon, Aubreon

Grant, Shari
Harrington, Erica
Henderson, Charisa
Henderson, Munah
Heyen, Haley
Hix, Stephanie
Humphrey, Lusha
Jacobs, Dyshika
Leesman, Meagan
Lindsey, Ashley
Malone, Ashley
Mason, Clarissa

Morse, Jacob
Motsi, Nicole
Neal, Chianne
Oglesby, Gabrielle
Rogers, Jennifer
Sebring, Dakota
Sibley, Ciara
Stevenson, Kahla
Walton, Cierra
Warstler, Kitwana
Williams, Michelle
Young, Baylee



Faculty and Staff

Our faculty and staff proudly participated in the December 2025 graduation ceremony, celebrating the achievements of our graduates. Their presence demonstrated strong institutional support and recognition of students' successful completion of the nursing program.

College HAPPENINGS

A look at life on campus and the impact we're making.



AUGUST 2025

Students and faculty participated in the state fair parade, representing the College and engaging with the broader community. The event provided an opportunity to promote the nursing program while fostering school pride and community connection.



MARCH 2026

St. John's College of Nursing partnered with the Early Learning Center (ELC) to host the biennial Teddy Bear Health Fair—an engaging event for young children and families. The fair helps ease fears while giving students hands-on experience to build communication skills and support community health.



APRIL 2026

St. John's College of Nursing hosted six Teen Health Care Exploration (THCE) sessions, connecting local high school students to hands-on learning and careers in health care. The program strengthens community ties while encouraging the next generation to pursue nursing. Sixteen students earned white coats this year, most planning to enter the field.

CLASS OF 1976

St. John's School of Nursing
Springfield, Illinois
Class of 1976

Class members (from top row to bottom row):
 B. Allen, J. Baker, J. Bialock, J. Boyce, D. Boush, B. Coffey, M. Cray, M. DeSantis, J. Deman, S. Dietel, M. Dugan, A. Eusterman, R. Gibson, K. Gullis, C. Gunn, J. Haines, J. Harbeck, M. Haurick, J. Hendon, K. Hocking, J. Hunsickel, A. Hummel, M. Jackson, J. Jansen, L. Jankowski, B. Jansen, M. Kettinga, E. Johnson, J. Kimmey, J. Koch, J. Kramer, K. McKee, M. McEwen, M. Maddox, S. Marburger, J. Marquardt, J. Millberg, C. Miller, E. Miller, M. Miller, E. Olszewy, P. Palk, K. Sandus, J. Schmitt, J. Schrage, J. Scott, S. Smith, E. Street, H. Stroh, J. Thede, C. Toohill, J. Wagoner, H. Walker.

What Was Happening 50 Years Ago

- White uniforms and caps remained standard nurse attire.
- A nationwide swine flu vaccination campaign became one of the largest public health efforts of the decade.
- America celebrated its Bicentennial—200 years of independence.
- "Happy Days" and "Laverne & Shirley" led primetime, while "Charlie's" Angles made its debut.
- At the movies, "Rocky" drew crowds, and a ticket cost around \$2.13.
- Nadia Comăneci made Olympic history with the first perfect 10 in gymnastics.
- Apple Computer was founded, marking the start of the personal tech era.
- Disco was in full swing. Dance floors, mood rings, fashion, and music defined the moment.
- "Silly Love Songs" by Paul McCartney & Wings topped the charts.
- Gasoline averaged about 59 cents per gallon.

2026 Distinguished Alumna

Mary Kay DeGroot
Class of 1965

With a nursing career spanning more than 30 years, Mary Kay served as a clinical coordinator, faculty member, and executive nursing leader.

Many remember her as both the beginning and end of their education, teaching Fundamentals of Nursing and later Nursing Leadership, and helping shape more than 500 students.

Her influence extended beyond the college through consulting and interim leadership roles across multiple health systems, strengthening nursing services and advancing quality care. Known for her thoughtful leadership and steady presence, she earned the respect of colleagues and students alike.

Mary Kay embodies the values of St. John's, including respect, caring, competence, and joy, through her commitment to doing what is right and supporting both patients and caregivers. Her service continues as a parish nurse and as an Associate of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, reflecting a lifelong dedication to compassionate care.

Her legacy lives on in the nurses she mentored, the leaders she influenced, and the lives she has touched. She is, in every way, a shining example of what it means to be a St. John's nurse.

Please join us in celebrating Mary Kay DeGroot, our 2026 Distinguished Alumna!

COLLEGE NEWS

Successful Accreditation Visit

St. John's College of Nursing proudly hosted a successful accreditation visit from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), resulting in the achievement of continuing accreditation through 2033 for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program.

This milestone reflects a comprehensive, college-wide commitment to academic excellence, continuous quality improvement, and student success. The accreditation process included an in-depth evaluation of curriculum, faculty qualifications, student outcomes, and institutional resources.

The successful outcome affirms the strength of the program and the dedication of faculty and staff in preparing practice-ready graduates to meet the evolving needs of health care.

This achievement positions the College for continued growth and innovation in baccalaureate nursing education.

NURSING RESEARCH & COMMUNITY IMPACT

St. John's College of Nursing continues to strengthen its commitment to scholarship, inquiry, and community engagement



In 2026, students and faculty partnered with local organizations to provide pre-K physicals for children at Springfield Urban League Head Start, supporting early childhood health and wellness.



The College welcomed Academic Nurse Scientist, Dr. Kelley McGuire, expanding capacity for research development, faculty mentorship, and scholarly productivity.



Student scholarship was showcased during the College's biannual Research Days, highlighting evidence-based practice projects and emerging research initiatives that contribute to improved health outcomes.



JOIN US AT THE ILLINOIS STATE FAIR

We're proud to represent the College in the State Fair Parade and invite our alumni and friends to join us for this long-standing tradition.
We hope to see you there!

Save the Date
THURSDAY
AUGUST 13, 2026
5:30 p.m.

IL STATE FAIR GROUNDS
SPRINGFIELD, IL

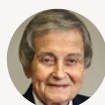
In Memoriam



Sharon K. Fane Steil
Class of 1962
Oct. 22, 1941 - Dec. 9, 2025



Mary Jane Fero
Class of 1948
Nov. 20, 1926 - May. 6, 2026



Sr. Mary Kelly
Class of 1955
Jul. 27, 1932 - Dec. 5, 2025

Update Your Contact Information



Scan the QR code to update your information and let us know your preferred communication method.