

Lynn Magoon, far right, is honored with a tree on the occasion of her retirement from St. Mary School in Goldsboro.



# For lifetimes

## Retiring principal is recognized for commitment to education, faith and others

BY ALEX BASS

**F**or Lynn Magoon, this year's fall foliage will offer a lifetime reminder of the family she brought together in faith. Her 33 years of ministry at Goldsboro's St. Mary Catholic School – the same amount of time as Jesus Christ's earthly life – ended as the 2022-2023 school year concluded.

Her community gathered May 25 as Bishop Luis Rafael Zarama dedicated a campus tree to Magoon, who served as the school's principal. The gathering included students and others present to mark her retirement and reception of the Lewis Award for Lifetime Achievement in Catholic Education.

"If God has plans and

whispers ... I certainly hope we listen. And I'm glad I did," she said.

Magoon, who taught writing at the college level, arrived at St. Mary in 1990. She and her husband, Don, and daughter, Jennifer, relocated to the Goldsboro area for Don's career.

By the 1995-96 academic year, Magoon had become

Saint Mary's first Lewis Award for Excellence in Teaching finalist. She was a language arts teacher at the time.

The award, which was initiated in 1992, honors educators in diocesan Catholic schools. The committee selects three finalists and, later, one recipient for the excellence in teaching honor, which is the equivalent of teacher of the year. The award has another component, too – Lifetime Achievement, with which Magoon was honored. To date, 10 of these awards have been given.

Magoon's time as principal concluded with back-to-back Lewis Award for Excellence in Teaching finalists – Carrie Talton (2021-22) and Renee Eltz (2022-23).

"For my name to be even listed in the same sentence with Lynn Magoon as far as excellence in teaching is just the biggest honor I can imagine," said Eltz. "I'm

getting choked up thinking about it."

She's well respected at her school, in part, because of her "servant leadership." Think about this. Magoon continued serving as a classroom teacher for all but one semester of her tenure as Saint Mary's lead administrator.

For her, education's greatest victories are won each day in what she playfully calls "the trenches."

This example left an impression.

"Nobody worked harder than her. She did it all so well," Eltz said. "She still was super creative. She still looked for new material, or new content to cover a standard. She was still in the thick of best practices."

Magoon praised her colleagues and students for supporting her "wearing two hats" as principal and teacher. Fostering a working model for this unique arrangement offered Magoon a natural opportunity to teach her students about idioms.

"If I can do it, then I don't mind as much asking my staff to do something," Magoon said. "If I told everybody we were going to do something, and I struggled with it ... then that made me rethink maybe we weren't doing it right."

For Magoon, intertwined faith and family legacies form the firm foundation of her lifetime achievements. Visual Catholic identity elements in all St. Mary's classrooms include photographs of the current pope and diocesan bishop. Whenever Magoon received rosaries, prayer cards, medals and other items from various Catholic organizations, she made them available for students in classrooms.

"Any of those things, if

they were a touchpoint for children to take just a little step forward in their faith, it was important to me,” Magoon said.

Magoon’s faith family was created one member at a time. And relationships were built for lifetimes.

Melissa Asbun, who teaches among St. Mary’s middle grades, first met Magoon in 2016 when looking for a school for her oldest daughter Alicia, who became one of Magoon’s students. Asbun and her family, while practicing Catholics, were questioning faith at that time.

“We came back to Church – very, very slowly,” Asbun said. “I saw the community that was there.”

Asbun began ministering as a substitute teacher in 2019 and became a full-time teacher in the fall of 2020. Asbun and her husband Alex have four children – Alicia (now 16), Alejandro (14), Ashley (10), and Juliana (7). The two oldest graduated from St. Mary and the two youngest are still there.

“One thing that made her stand out was how

empathetic she is. She also has one of the most in-depth understandings of children and adolescents that I have ever encountered,” Alicia Asbun said. “She inspired students to do and be their best. She not only taught academic materials but also how to navigate life.”

Helping people navigate life by creating diversity in the school and creating meaningful opportunities for families to access Catholic education is integral to Magoon’s legacy. She intentionally worked on scholarships and student aid. She worked to have a student body that reflected the diversity, particularly among Latino communities, of the parish and the greater Goldsboro community.

Magoon smiled at the thought of how many times she ended weeks seeing parents come to campus – often straight from work – to give what they could toward education. Sometimes additional school uniforms were needed.

While directing them to the uniforms stash, Magoon



Anne Stahel, chair emeritus of the Lewis Award Committee, hugs Lynn Magoon (holding award) at St. Mary Church.

would often tell them she didn’t care if they made a donation or not.

“We were such a much better community for having done it. They brought so much to us that we didn’t even know we were missing,” she said.

As Magoon was gathered at the same Eucharistic table with her husband, daughter, godchildren, faculty/staff, and students, many thought of her compelling Catholic faith witness.

“Her religiousness was very contagious. In Mass, she would always be present,” Father John-Alex González, her former pastor, said. “The kids just followed her example.”

After Mass (at which Monsignor Gerald Lewis, the award’s namesake, was present), Magoon extended her servant-leader example, again. She could be overheard reassuring one of her previous students, who now has a child

at Saint Mary School, about a concern.

“Mrs. Magoon built a school that functioned as a family, whose students had a reputation not only for high academic achievement but also integrity,” Melissa Asbun said. “She created a school environment that was reflective of how God intended for us to live, full of love, understanding and acceptance.”

Magoon, ever true to her desire to take a background position to her students and faculty/staff, tried to hide among the preschoolers and kindergarteners when it was time for the tree dedication. Bishop Luis called her to stand in a front and center position for the rite.

“I always say, ‘God takes care of fools like me.’ He’s allowed me to be able to do that – using my judgement,” Magoon said. “Seldom have I been burned by that judgement. I’ve lived a very blessed life.” †

