Forgiving Rwanda

Survivor Immaculee Ilibagiza described the horrors of the Rwandan genocide to more than 900 rapt listeners who packed the Mirenda Center for Sport, Spirituality and Character Development on March 7 for a chance to hear her story first hand.

Ilibagiza lost both of her parents and two brothers to the carnage that wracked the country in the aftermath of the president’s plane being shot down in April 1994. The death of the president, a Hutu, fueled hatred for the Tutsis, the minority tribe in the African country. A Hutu neighbor, who concealed Ilibagiza and seven other women in a bathroom that measured 3’ by 4’, left a radio playing within earshot of the eight frightened women. There, Ilibagiza heard reports that “the government was calling on people to kill everyone in my tribe.” Broadcasts called the Tutsis “cockroaches and snakes.”

The women spent 91 days in the tiny bathroom, totally dependent on whatever small portions of food and water the neighbor could smuggle into them. After the ordeal, she recalled the words of her father, a teacher: “Never generalize people. Never put people in boxes.” Ilibagiza took those words to heart, understood that all Hutus were not to blame for the outrageous actions of a small segment of the tribe, and has dedicated herself to spreading her father’s message of forgiveness and reconciliation ever since.

“No, no one is a Hutu or Tutsi,” stated Ilibagiza. “We’re all Rwandans.”

Philly Picks Pickul

The Philly Ad Club selected Andrew Pickul, a junior communication arts major, to receive one of its annual 13 Philly’s Future Scholarship Awards. Pickul is editor-in-chief of The Joust and sports director for Neumann Radio. The scholarship from the largest professional advertising organization in Philadelphia is worth $1,000.

Recipients must be nominated by a faculty member and demonstrate academic, personal and professional excellence to a panel of Philly Ad Club judges.
Guests in the Circle

On April 1, two commissioned statues were placed in St. John Neumann Circle. The most prominent, on a high base and at the Circle’s center, is of St. John Neumann, the namesake of the University. The second, at ground level and facing the students who walk from the Living and Learning Centers and the Mirenda Center, is a representation of a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia. Sculptor Steve Kilpatrick, an expert in sacred art, created both pieces for the University and was on hand to oversee the installation of his work.

After the May 2010 Commencement Exercises, dozens of families flocked to the Circle to take photographs with one of the new statues in the background.

Dedication of the Circle is scheduled for Homecoming 2010.

St. John Neumann is at the center of campus.

Signs of Progress

One of the last steps in completing the transition to university status began to appear on campus in March with the installation of new directional and building signs. St. John Neumann Circle, the Thomas A. Bruder, Jr. Life Center and the Rocco A. Abessinio Building were the first locations marked with large, blue signs, the swooping outlines of which echo the University logo and the roofline of the Mirenda Center for Sport, Spirituality and Character Development.

Two blue and gold directional signs are also in place with more to come.

The University will also seek permission from Aston Township to install two LED signs, one at the main campus entrance on Concord Road and one along Convent Road in front of the Mirenda Center.

Baiada Named to 50 Best

Ann Baiada, a member of the University Board of Trustees and director of Bayada Nurses, a national home health care company, was named one of the Best 50 Women in Business by NJBIZ, a weekly business publication in New Jersey. Chosen from among hundreds of nominees, she was selected for her significant contribution to the growth of Bayada Nurses. Baiada initiated training and mentoring programs for nurses and developed clinical services that improved the quality of care for patients.

Charter Day Degrees

Neumann celebrated its 45th anniversary by awarding honorary degrees to Bishop Timothy Senior, auxiliary bishop of Philadelphia, and Sr. Esther Anderson OSF, congregational minister of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. Bishop Senior delivered the seventh annual Dr. Dorothy A.P. Leunissen Lecture on the topic of vocations. His address was inspired by Pope Benedict XVI’s designation of 2010 as the Year of the Priest.
Honorary Degrees Awarded to Walter and Beverly Lomax

Dr. Walter P. Lomax, Jr. and Beverly Hill Lomax received honorary degrees from the University at the April Academic Awards Convocation.

Dr. Lomax is a physician, entrepreneur and philanthropist who had an illustrious career founding and growing companies in the health care field. Now the chairman of The Lomax Companies, he began his career in 1958 as a solo practitioner in the South Philadelphia where he grew up.

After serving their community for more than 40 years, the couple formed The Lomax Family Foundation in 2003 to provide funding for eligible non-profit organizations that promote art, health, education and culture in the African American community. The foundation’s purpose is a close match to Beverly’s personal philosophy, “to share creation through artful, mindful living.”

Dr. and Mrs. Lomax have been married for more than 50 years. They have six children and 15 grandchildren. He received the degree of Doctor of Science, Honoris Causa, for his deep commitment to providing quality health care to the underserved, for his distinguished service as a physician, and his relentless philanthropic efforts in the community in which he lives and works. She received the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa, for her relentless support of philanthropic efforts of the Lomax Foundation.

Former Penn State football player Adam Taliaferro was the keynote speaker at the Convocation. Taliaferro broke his neck in a football game in September of 2000 after a routine helmet-to-helmet tackle. He was given a three percent chance of walking again and today he not only walks, but walks well. Now a lawyer, Taliaferro started the Adam Taliaferro Foundation, providing financial assistance to individuals affected by spinal cord injuries. Through his foundation, he continues to provide hope for people who feel there is no reason to hope at all.

The Academic Awards Convocation acknowledges the excellence and achievements of all students who have distinguished themselves academically and in service to others. Neumann also recognizes the parents, relatives, and friends who have assisted our awardees along their academic journey. Highlights of the Academic Awards Convocation included the presentation of the valedictory medal to Mark Auger, the Delta Epsilon Sigma Undergraduate Award to Russell Spangler, the Sr. M. Everilda Flynn Award for Excellence in Elementary Education to Jennifer Bachman, and the Sr. M. Everilda Flynn-Mary K. Brod Award for Excellence in Nursing to Dorothy Lennon.
Nurses Apply Theory to Reality on Mexican Border

Neumann nurses hit the road over spring break for their community health class to see what they were learning translated into reality. Christine Mercandetti, New Hope; Candy Jefferies, Wilmington, Delaware; Rachel Venable, Audubon, New Jersey, and Jennifer DeLany, Wallingford, all traveled to Laredo, Texas, with their advisor, Nancy Laplante, to learn about health issues in other communities. They worked with students at Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) and volunteers at Mercy Ministries.

The students were required to keep a journal during the trip and identify three personal goals they had for the experience. They also had to prepare a health promotion presentation on a topic that would be aimed at the population served by Mercy Ministries with special attention to social and cultural considerations.

“I hoped this experience would be a cultural immersion for our students. I also wanted them to see a true sense of community health nursing in the work of the Sisters of Mercy in Laredo, and I hoped they would learn about the people of Laredo,” said Laplante.

“Really seeing the community aspects of why they have such issues with high cholesterol, obesity, and the lack of understanding about diabetes was an eye opener. They had so many fast food places instead of healthy alternatives,” said Venable.

The first day included a tour of TAMIU, visiting with Mercy Ministries, the Gateway Health Center, and the Public Health Center. The students viewed presentations on human trafficking, immigration, and domestic violence at Mercy Ministries before traveling to a local shelter, the Colonias. They also shadowed an R.N. and L.P.N. in a pharmacy.

The experience that stood out most in the students’ minds was visiting the Colonias, a residential community started by the government to provide low-income people with affordable housing. People with low incomes often buy the lots through a contract for deed, a property financing method whereby developers typically offer a low down payment and low monthly payments. “I couldn’t believe there were places with no running water in America, yet the people were so welcoming,” said Jefferies.

“One woman allowed us to see her house in the Colonias. She lived with her grandchildren in a dilapidated home with no running water. The ground was really dry and there was no sewer system. Their bathroom was under a tarp in the backyard,” said Venable

All of the students still keep in touch with the TAIMU students via Facebook. “If one of us posts something about graduation, they comment,” DeLany said. “Since we are all nursing students, we have a lot of the same difficulties and experiences,” said Jefferies.

The students feel they have benefitted from the trip. “I am thankful for the opportunity to broaden my horizons on how much culture affects health. You don’t understand what community health really is until you are in that setting,” said Mercandetti.

There are already plans in the works to enrich next year’s experience. “My plan is for this trip to be an annual event. I would also like to see some sort of project before we go, such as a food drive or school supplies collection so that we can donate it to the Laredo community,” said Laplante.