



◀ Johanna (LaRosa) Burani in Benaco, Tanzania.

▼ Dan Maurer is pictured in Nepal at the site of a primary school sanitation project.

NOURISHING THE SOUL

At St. Bonaventure, we remain as passionate as ever about our Franciscan tradition and the opportunity it provides to offer a transformational experience for our students. That transcends to so many of our alumni who nourish and share that passion throughout their lives. Johanna (LaRosa) Burani, Class of 1969, and Anthony Mancini and Dan Maurer, both Class of 2009, may have graduated 40 years apart, but they are connected spiritually by a deep-held sense of purpose and concern for others.



SEE
PAGE
25

Two men, one country: Classmates Anthony Mancini and Dan Maurer are helping to rebuild Nepal one village at a time

By Dr. Tracy Schrems

In 2005, freshmen Anthony Mancini and Dan Maurer walked into my English composition class, took a seat, and proceeded to drag me along on their journey to chart lives guided by the teachings of St. Francis.

They opted to study business administration and marketing and eventually both graduated with bachelor's degrees in those areas. But their story is far more than graduating, finding a job in corporate America, and working toward the traditional American dream.

Instead, this is a story of two men who were part Peter Pan, part Robin Hood, and 100 percent passionate about giving back to a cultural community that gave them so much love and friendship. That community was in the remote villages of Nepal.

To know Anthony and Dan is to understand that neither one has met an airline he didn't like. Their wanderlust first began with their move to Australia to study abroad for their junior year. I had received occasional emails and periodic phone calls keeping me abreast of what they were up to, and more than once I had to remind them to get off Bondi Beach and go to class.

However, what I didn't realize was the amount of work they were doing with the indigenous population in the outback and their total immersion in that culture. In fact, it wasn't until they returned to campus for their senior year that I realized what they had been doing: exploring



Alumni Dan Maurer (left) and Anthony Mancini formed the nonprofit Elevate Nepal to help the Nepalese in remote villages.

their passions for cultural immersion and helping those who live in poverty.

Naturally, they didn't tell me this. In fact, the only thing they did admit to when I saw them at the beginning of their senior year was that they didn't want to be on campus and instead were ready to return to Australia. I remember laughing and telling them that Peter Pan was simply a myth and it was time to embrace their inevitable entrance into adulthood.

At that time, I didn't realize how incredibly wrong I was. These were not typical college students; instead, they were two men who were on the verge of discovering how they could do their part to make the world a better place.

After graduation, neither one had any desire to enter into the workforce. Instead, they gathered their passports and headed out of the country back to Australia. Once again, I began to receive periodic phone calls from Anthony that simply kept me up to date as to what they were up to.

At one point, I discovered that Anthony had gone on "walkabout" in Australia and settled in an indigenous commune, learning how to farm as well as live according to their culture. Dan, after exploring his interests in Australia, flew to Vietnam where he spent a number of months exploring the country and learning about the Vietnamese people all from the back of a scooter. He, too, immersed himself in the Vietnamese culture, learning more about the people than what was taught in history books.

This wanderlust continued until the fall of 2011, when they both agreed to meet up in Nepal to begin their tour of Asia.

On this trip, both men found their lives irrevocably changed for the better.

WHEN THEY WERE UNDERGRADUATES, we spent hours talking about their passions for helping those in need as well as their interests in indigenous cultures and their work with BonaResponds.

Dan was a business management major/marketing minor and Anthony was a business administration major with an eye toward starting his own nonprofit business; however, neither one wanted to enter a job market that wasn't exactly friendly to college graduates. When we talked about it, my only advice to both of them was to embrace whatever they were passionate about and follow it to wherever it took them.

So, they started traveling the world. As a result, I received my "annual phone call" that each year allowed me to play "Where in the world are Anthony



One of Elevate Nepal's upcoming projects is to fund the rebuilding of a 700-student primary school in the village of Sarsyu.

and Dan?" much like the Carmen Sandiego game and TV show of the '80s and '90s. In 2011, they found themselves in Nepal.

During that year's call, Anthony told me about the plan to "get lost in Nepal for three months," which included "35 days trekking through remote villages to Everest base camp and back."

He then described the two months that he and Dan spent working on two different farms with host families, learning and developing a better understanding of the struggles that remote villagers face. He also talked about how today "poverty can be a product of globalization and lack of knowledge" and how he had become inspired to use his skills to give back to the wonderful Nepali people.

THE LESSONS THE TWO OF THEM had learned about the ways of St. Francis were clearly part of their lives, and I realized that regardless of the name of the class, the content affected them more than even Anthony realized. He wanted to fight poverty on the ground level, and both he and Dan wanted to do it in Nepal.

"I became heartbroken over how tourists treated the country of Nepal," said Anthony. "From the Mount Everest climbers, who flock to the mountain in an effort to climb it but leave trash and empty bottles of oxygen along the way, to the candy wrappers and processed foods and sodas brought into Nepal by Western tourists that are left to pile up in villages and along hiking paths throughout the country, these villages are being consumed with trash.

"When you travel to a remote village in one of the most beautiful corners of the world and see trash is everywhere, you wonder how others aren't sad and disgusted as well. But it just doesn't seem to be the case. The Nepali people cannot bear the full brunt of this blame as they have lived a very organic lifestyle since the later part of the 20th century. However, with the increase of tourism brought on by different companies, more specifically those companies in the business of shepherding people to the summit of Mount Everest, Nepal has become inundated with trash and disease that normally would not appear in any of the villages outside the cities."



To learn more about Elevate Nepal and upcoming projects, visit elevatenepalinc.org or [@elevatenepalinc](#) on social media.



I could hear the sadness and devastation in Anthony's voice when he talked about the level of poverty the Nepali people faced as well as the abject ignorance in how Westerners treated the land.

It was at this moment that I realized Anthony had found his passion. It was evident in his voice. Moreover, he was preparing to follow that passion, and knowing

him as I did, it wouldn't be long until Dan was right there with him.

I was right. Dan was completely on board. His involvement became a way for him to continue to pursue his interests in creating a nonprofit business as well as "empower communities to grow in a responsible, sustainable manner."

Both men felt Nepal was bullied by globalization. As Dan shared:

"All over Nepal one can see fading traditions and cultures as young people move to the cities or abroad to obtain education or employment. Young people feel there is no opportunity in the villages.



In the village of Kholegaon, Elevate Nepal is facilitating the rebuilding of six earthquake-resistant homes. In 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, followed closely by a 7.3-magnitude aftershock. Today, millions of Nepalese citizens remain homeless, or cramped among family members in tarp shelters or makeshift tin huts. At right is a building damaged three years ago in the quake.



We can help by giving them opportunities through agriculture programs and renewable energy projects that would allow families to stay together and allow villages to thrive and keep their traditions alive."

Something about Nepal's traditions and cultures impacted them in such a way that they decided to devote themselves to helping the people there. They both wanted to spend part of the year in Nepal with some of the most beautiful people in the world making sure that their culture didn't disappear and helping them overcome crippling poverty.

Then, in 2015, things changed. Nepal was hit with a devastating earth-



earthquake remained on my radar for as long as the media coverage focused on it. When it became “old news,” I filed it away.

However, in the summer of 2015 when Anthony called, I could tell something was different. My phone call from Anthony started out much like the others: *Hi, how have you been? Where are you? Where is Dan? What is he doing? What are you doing? What do you mean you almost fell off a mountain hiking to Everest base camp?*

You know, the simple, everyday questions you ask of people you haven't heard from in a year.

Though the story about nearly falling off a mountain in the Himalayas didn't necessarily shock me since I was talking to him, Anthony's description of the destruction many of the remote villages experienced after the earthquake and its subsequent tremors was overwhelming.

Whole villages had been decimated and Anthony and Dan saw this firsthand. The Nepali people had lost everything, from shelters to basic sanitation to farms and livestock. I could tell just from talking to him that he was shaken from the devastation he was witnessing.

THAT'S WHEN HE TOLD ME about the nonprofit business Dan and he were creating. Elevate Nepal Inc. was created for the sole purpose of helping the Nepali people in remote villages rebuild their communities. The list of things that needed to be done to help the Nepali people was endless.

Schools and homes needed to be rebuilt. Basic human needs, such as developing a reliable sanitation system, also needed to be met.

Elevate Nepal Inc. was born, operated out of their home in Flagstaff, Ariz. So far, they have raised funds to:

- rebuild a school in the village of Sarysu that educates 700 children from the nearby villages;
- rebuild a sanitation system that provides clean water for some of the hardest hit villages in that province;
- provide temporary housing for multiple families throughout some of the hardest hit villages.

However, they do more than raise money.

They take that money, travel to Nepal, purchase supplies and help the villagers by getting their hands dirty. Both are hands on with these projects, passionate about rebuilding Nepal. And both are following dreams that began on the Bonaventure campus.

At St. Bonaventure, we embrace the teachings of St. Francis, who looked beyond the materialistic needs of society into the soul and proceeded to nourish that. He administered to those who had nothing and chose to spread love and acceptance.

Anthony and Dan are yet another example of exactly what's right with this university. We taught them and mentored them and they took those lessons and became true Franciscans, soaring above and beyond anything I ever hoped to teach them. We just taught them; they did the work. Now, they are changing the world.

I'm simply grateful that I had a small part in watching them grow. They are destined to make the world a better place.



(Dr. Tracy Schrems is a lecturer in the Department of English at St. Bonaventure.)

quake, the worst natural disaster to hit the country in 80 years.

I knew about the earthquake, the devastation it caused, and the fact that the mass destruction left the Nepali people more impoverished than ever. Worse, its effects canceled the 2016 Mount Everest climbing season, a season that employs a large majority of the Nepali Sherpa as climbing guides. It was awful and, like most of the world, I empathized with those who survived.

And, like most of the world, I moved on to the next major event in my own life as well as in the world as a whole. The

Thank you for inspiring me

I thought I knew.

I thought I knew 42 years ago when I first visited campus with friars from Bishop Timon in Buffalo and fell in love with the place.

I thought I knew on Nov. 13, 2016, when I received the call informing me that I had been selected as the 21st president of St. Bonaventure University, soothing the sting of being unable to attend Bona's as a student.

I was wrong. I didn't know.

I knew Bonaventure was a special place, but only after serving my first year as president did I fully appreciate how special. You don't have to look any further than

the pages of this magazine to see the evidence.

The cover story (page 16) on the remarkable success of our HEOP program says all you need to know about the personalized attention we give our students, and is a credit to the program Margaret Bryner built and Bridget Kehrer took over in 2014.

That personalized attention focused on student success — inside and outside the classroom — begins for all Bonnies before they set foot in a classroom.

Summer Orientation, which just wrapped up in July for the largest freshman class in 10 years, is the

first time students begin to understand how invested faculty, staff and many upperclass schoolmates are in their success. That commitment persists for four years.

The way we walk the talk of our mission inspires me.

As an academic and spiritual community, we endeavor to prepare our students for the challenges they will face ... (and) true to our Franciscan heritage, we encourage students to manifest our values through lives of citizenship and service.

Those aren't my words. They're taken right from our mission statement and I see them lived every day, not only on campus but far from it, by alumni doing noble

work around the world.

Please take some time to read what Johanna (LaRosa) Burani, '69, is doing in Tanzania and what Anthony Mancini and Dan Maurer, both class of '09, are doing in Nepal. They might have graduated 40 years apart, but they're connected spiritually by a sense of purpose and a concern for others instilled in them by the Franciscan ethos that has permeated this university for 160 years.

We remain as passionate as ever about our Franciscan tradition and the opportunity it provides to offer a transformational human experience for students of all faiths.

What I've come to admire most about the members of the campus community is their willingness to take risks. So often, colleges are resistant to change, but I've seen nothing except a willingness to do whatever's necessary to advance the university. I couldn't be more grateful.

Maybe what surprised me more than anything in my first year was seeing the spirit and connectivity of our alumni. I mean, having grown up in Buffalo and wanting to go here, I had always heard of the "Bonaventure cult." But to witness firsthand how deep your pride runs, how passionate and willing you are to do whatever it takes to help us succeed, is amazing.

ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski, '91, lived through one of the worst periods in Bonaventure basketball history. That didn't stop him from going deep into his pockets to spur a one-day \$53,000 fund drive that sent students he's never met to Dayton to see the Bonnies knock off UCLA (page 28).

That's just one of a thousand examples of Bonnies looking out for Bonnies, from internship and job opportunities to coming back to campus to share their expertise and wisdom with our students.

Mike Padlo just graduated a year ago May, and in a Facebook post three months later, he welcomed incoming freshmen "to the best place on Earth."

At the time, I was on the job for only three months, so it seemed like a little hyperbole.

Now? I think he might be right.



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