Newsprint discusses the Catholic League and what the new changes mean for the Mercy community on

Pages 4-5

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Index

3 NEWS

Evolving Israel-Hamas conflict is nothing

new

By Reese Kizy & Tess O'Donnell

4/5 SPORTS FEATURE

New competition enters the Catholic

League

By Maura McSweeney

6 FEATURE

Diving deeper into the cultures at Mercy

By Daria Smith

7 FEATURE

Focus: Hope partners with Mercy to make a

difference

By Megan Sullivan

8 FEATURE

The cast of Frozen takes on the Big Apple

December Athletics Calendar

By Micah Rogers

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Evolving Israel-Hamas conflict is nothing new

STORY AND GRAPHICS: REESE KIZY & TESS O'DONNELL

The swirl of controversy and confusion surrounding the war between Israel and Hamas has gained much attention in the Mercy community. The current conflict began October 7, after the Palestinian militant group, Hamas, launched an attack from their occupied land in the Gaza Strip. But the long history of tension between Israel and the Palestinians before the war broke out is what has really driven this extremely deadly series of attacks. Communities all over the world mourn the loss of thousands of Israeli and Palestinian people, as the death toll reaches great heights, and questions of whether this conflict will ever be settled with the two states still intact, arise.

The complexity of this conflict has been well researched by Social Studies teacher, Mrs. Gretchen Faunce.

"It really became an issue when Israel became a country, in 1948, after World War II. Earlier in the century there had been that issue called Zionism which made a lot of Jewish people want to move back to the holy land. That, international support after the Holocaust, and intense antisemitism spread them all over and increased the movement to go to what is now Israel," Faunce said.

Jewish people in the mid-20th century were not only discriminated against, but also determined to form a land of their own. Although these Jewish people came from different European countries, they wanted to form a unified land especially because they were unwelcome in many places.

"Palestinians lived [in modern-day Israel], and this area was also controlled by the Ottoman Empire at some point, and the British at another; the territory itself would be complicated but peaceful, up until around 100 years ago," Faunce said. "The Arab-Israeli war began in 1948, pretty much immediately after Israel was declared a country."

Disagreements about territorial boundaries continued to fuel conflict.

"After that war, the UN became involved in the conflict, and they declared Israel's land bigger than what it was before," Faunce said. "However, Israel's land has continued to grow, and today, the Palestinian part is very, very small."

The Palestinian people have fought for the land they do have for many decades. However, because of the weakened condition of Palestine, and the powerful alliances Israel holds, Israeli forces creep into this hazy territory more and more, so the land that Palestinian groups govern is increasingly small, as Faunce explained. Native people living in the areas controlled by Palestinian groups have roots and can trace their ethnicities back to being Palestinian. But now, they do not have an official nation to call their homeland, and it is because of this long struggle for territory with Israelis.

"The Hamas organization came about in the 80s, initially a part of the Muslim Brotherhood, and immediately when they gained recognition, they were deemed as a terrorist group," Faunce said.

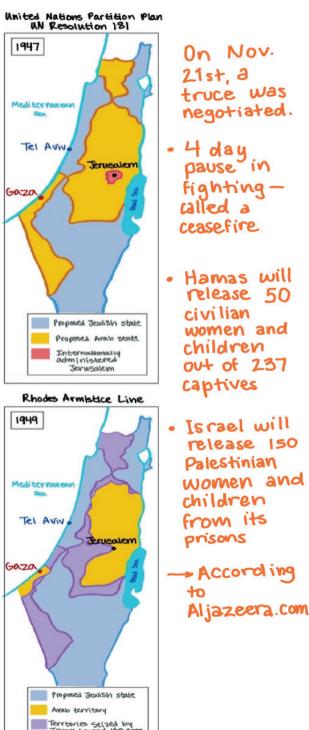
The Palestinian Legislative council and Hamas was dicredited because Hamas was deemed a terrorist group by much of the western world, mainly because of their violent attacks, but also because of their alliance with other nations such as Iran. Hamas is based in the Gaza Strip, which is why that is where the main attacks have been occurring.

"The Middle East backs the Palestinians, where the western world, including America, backs Israel. The U.S. has pretty much always said they would side with Israel, mainly financially," Faunce said.

Recently, America has aided and assisted Israel, with President Biden publicly announcing that America does not support terrorists, in reference to Hamas.

"When some students come in and ask me if America is going to war, I don't really know how to respond, but in my opinion, I don't think the U.S. would ever put troops on the ground there— it's too dangerous," Faunce said.

With the involvement America has in the Middle East,



it is hard to say for sure whether Faunce's statement will prove true for the future.

An informational meeting by Mercy's debate club on October 23 was held to try to get its members up to date on the complexities of the war. Their meeting was based on the history of the issue and the current needs of the civilians there.

Senior Grace Eliya has been a club leader since last year, and has led the debate club into many important discussions. She explained that during the time of World War II, Britain had owned the land that is now Israel and Palestinian territories. In response to the Holocaust, Britain allowed Jewish refugees to seek asylum in that 'unclaimed' land, which they would later turn into their own state— Israel.

"In 1947, the United Nations adopted Resolution 181, known as the Partition Plan, which was meant to divide the British Mandate of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states," Eliya said.

This decision to share the land between the Jewish and Palestinian people was made, but the exact partitions of the land was not agreed upon by the Arab council and Palestinian groups, which is what has caused the conflicts between these people for the past seven decades. Eliya carried the debate club's discussion into analyzing the detrimental effects the war has had on civilians.

"Israel has full control over Gaza's electricity, water, and cut its power— putting hospitals in crisis. More than 4,650 people have been killed in Gaza in the past two weeks, including more than 1,870 children, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry," Eliya said.

This control of resources has greatly strained defense on the side of Hamas, causing more Palestinian civilian deaths.

"Israel has confirmed that 212 people are being held hostage in Gaza. An additional 100 people are missing, according to United Nations," Eliya said.

These tolls, as of October 23, have only continued to rise. The latest death tolls were reported on November 7th, when according to reporting by CNN, more than 1200 deaths in Israel and 11,470 deaths in Gaza occurred.

On November 21, Israel and Hamas agreed to a temporary ceasefire and that ceasefire was extended for two additional days on November 27. Israel has further claimed that they will extend the ceasefire by one day for every 10 hostages released. Hamas agreed to the ceasefire under the same terms. The hostages being released on both sides have returned to their families, but more fighting in the future is forecasted.

All in all, the Mercy community continues to be affected by this war. The culture of Palestinians, and therefore all Arabs, as well as the Jewish culture, is being threatened by the state of their homeland and the rising amount of deaths. As one of the critical concerns of Mercy, we look forward to non-violence that we pray will come. Let us continue to pray for peace in this part of the world.

Diving deeper into the cultures at Mercy

STORY AND PHOTOS: DARIA SMITH

ulture, food, and artistry- three words that describe one of Mercy's most anticipated events of the school year. Ethnic Bazaar is an annual event that highlights different cultures around the Mercy community through dance performances, cultural foods, and artwork displayed in the lobby. This year, Ethnic Bazaar will highlight a number of different cultures such as Greek, Middle Eastern, African, Irish and more. Ethnic Bazaar takes place today Friday. December 1 and running from 2nd hour to 6th hour in the Drama Studio.

"When the event has arrived every year, it turns out to be a really nice occasion and everyone has an experience that I don't think they'll forget," Human Relations Council Moderator Mr. Steve Morgan said.

At Mercy, HRC is in charge of putting together Ethnic Bazaar and making it as unforgettable as possible. Ethnic Bazaar takes about a month and a half to plan and promote. They began to talk about planning the event during their first meeting. From there, figure out who is performing, what spaces they will need to reserve, and what supplies they need to get in order to have enough space and decorations to set up for the big performance day. Though Ethnic Bazaar is extremely fun, the amount of work put in to set it up is a huge reason why the event is a continuous success year after year.

'Watching the audience's reactions and taking the significance of the event all in makes all the stress of planning worth it," Morgan said.



Bringing Southeast Europe to Mercy, the Hellenic Student Association, led by senior Zoe Vláhadamis, will be bringing Greek culture to Mercy. Through multiple traditional Greek dances and foods, such as rice pudding, chicken lemon rice, and Spanakopita.

Greek club hopes to highlight what they believe to be the special parts of Greek culture.

"By starting Greek club and participating in Ethnic Bazaar, I wanted to share my love for my culture with the other girls at Mercy," Vláhadamis said.

Chicken lemon rice soup

Moving to the Middle East, the Middle Eastern Student Association will be bringing Middle Eastern culture to Mercy. MESA will be performing dances that originated from all across the Middle East such as Bagiye, Khiga, Dabke, etc. There will also be a variety of Middle Eastern cuisine featured at Ethnic Bazaar, including Takhratha (meat and cheese pies), baklava, keleche, kibbeh, burek, and more. MESA is excited to share their authentic customs and flavors with Mercy.

"MESA wanted to participate in Ethnic Bazaar this year because we feel passionately about representing our culture and keeping it alive here at Mercy," MESA club leader Ella Poota said. "Participating in Ethnic Bazaar gives us the opportunity to embrace our culture and shine light on the beauty of our unique customs and traditions."



Baklava



Collard Greens

Bringing soul to Mercy, the Black Awareness Society for Education will be bringing African culture to Mercy throug Step, African dances, and Hip-Hop performances. There will be a various number of soul food dishes such as macaroni and cheese, collard greens, and fried chicken. BASE strives to showcase the

different parts of black culture and how African Americans express themselve through different dances.

"Ethnic Bazaar showcases all the different cultures that are usually not talked about a lot, especially minorities," junior and Step dance leader Jada Roberts said.

For many students, Ethnic Bazaar is a lot more than just an event in the drama studio, but instead an opportunity to showcase their culture and educate others. Although Mercy is a diverse school, there is not always an opportunity for students to learn about their fellow classmates' backgrounds. Many students who participate in Ethnic Bazaar believe it is an important event that takes place at Mercy, because it allows them to represent who they are and express themselves through their culture.

"Ethnic Bazaar allows students of all different cultural backgrounds to embrace who they are and where they come from with unending support from their Mercy sisters," Poota said. "It encourages everyone to be proud of who they are and share a part of themselves that they typically would not reveal or embrace."

New competition enters the Catholic League

STORY, PHOTO AND GRAPHICS: MAURA MCSWEENEY, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

his year, Mercy Athletics teams as well as fellow Catholic League teams were faced with a change to their schedules. They were going to Ohio. While it is not uncommon to travel farther distances for games, these games would be league games and in another state.

On March 26, 2022, the Detroit Catholic League announced the addition of six teams into the conference, five of which are located in the Toledo area. Central Catholic High School, Notre Dame Academy, St. Francis de Sales School, St. John's Jesuit High School, and St. Ursula Academy are all Catholic schools located in the Toledo area while Lumen Christi, the sixth addition, is located in the Jackson area. Mercy Athletics is affected by three of these additions as Notre Dame Academy and St. Ursula Academy are all-girls while Toledo Central Catholic is co-ed. WHO MADE THIS DECISION?

A decision such as this one was not taken without thoughtful consideration and conversations about all aspects, good and bad, about the expansion. Despite what many may think, the ultimate decision to allow these new schools to join was not officially made by the Catholic League, rather it was made by the Executive Athletic Board.

"The decision to increase our overall membership was decided on by school principals and athletic directors; it wasn't a decision that was made strictly by the Catholic League staff," Associate Catholic League Director Mike Evoy said.

The decision to welcome these schools to the league was not taken lightly. The process to admit new schools was not short, nor was it without input from school leaders, athletic directors, and the Catholic League staff.

"[The Catholic League staff] does a lot of the leg work," Evoy said. "We had a number of meetings with the Toledo schools in advance, and once we had vetted everything, we brought it before and it was voted upon by principals and athletic directors who represent other schools." WHAT ABOUT THE TRAVEL?

One of the biggest concerns when faced with this new change is travel. People have debated questions like how much time will be spent traveling to these new schools in Ohio or how will this increase travel costs when in reality, there isn't that much of a difference in time despite it being across state borders.

"There's imaginary boundaries, but we're starting to overcome those," Evoy said. "For example, the travel from De La Salle to Detroit Catholic Central is pretty close to the same travel time from De La Salle to Toledo St. John's which seems surprising because of that imaginary state boundary."

For Mercy, travel times may be a bit longer, but it is worth it for the extra competition and helped by the fact that the teams will not be traveling there weekly. Out of Mercy's 21 sports, only 7 sports will be forced to compete against and travel to these new schools.

"It doesn't affect all of our sports so that helps," Mercy Athletic Director Brandon Malinowski said. "Sports that it does affect may have to go there twice per season."

In addition, some sports already had to travel for games or matches. Mercy Varsity Golf has a different experience than most in the fact that their matches are different than games.

"We went to St. Ursula for a match, and for us, it wasn't a big deal because we have to drive an hour to Lutheran North every year anyway, so an hour and 15 minutes wasn't out of the ordinary," Mercy Varsity Golf captain Abby Slankster said.

IS THE NEW COMPETITION BENEFICIAL OR **TAKING AWAY OPPORTUNITIES?**

It is no question that with more teams comes more competition. While some may say that it is good for programs to face higher levels of competition to prepare them for the state competitions, there is no doubt that this competition is also a challenge.

The Mercy Varsity Golf team has won two consecutive state championships the past two years and won the Catholic League Championship in 2022. Now, they did not come home with a Catholic League title in 2023, rather they came home with a 2nd place trophy as they fell short behind Toledo's St. Ursula Academy, one of the new additions to the Catholic League.

"I think that there's been pros and cons to the new additions. Now, there's more of a field to play against because we previously only had three other teams on our side of the division." Slankster said. "It was a little frustrating because we tied the school record at the Catholic League Championship and we still lost to a team from Ohio even though we would've won had they not been in the league."

The Mercy Varsity Volleyball team has been fighting for the top spot in the Catholic League with Marian for the past years. Dominating the Catholic League and the larger state of Michigan, Mercy won the State Championship in 2019 followed by Marian winning the past three years and Mercy winning again this year.



Junior Cree Hollier prepares to hit the ball over the net during the first set of Mercy Varsity Volleyball's game. On September 20, Mercy Varsity Vollyeball competed against Toledo's Notre Dame Academy and won in three sets.

"The battle was always between Mercy and Marian in volleyball. Now, you've introduced St. Ursula who is really good in volleyball a nd finished runner-up in Division 2 in Ohio," Evoy said. "It raised the competition level and added new rivalries."

Good competition is essential to reaching success for these teams. Even though the Catholic League has 33 teams, that doesn't mean that Mercy is playing 33 teams as there are many divisions within the league. This can sometimes be a downfall for bigger schools as they are either dominant or are avoided by other schools.

"In volleyball, a lot of teams try to drop lower so they don't have to play us," Malinowski said. "Playing these teams gives us an edge once we get to the state playoffs because we've seen teams that we previously hadn't seen before."

This is a common theme among the seven sports teams affected by

"I know that people are upset that it's the Detroit Catholic League this change. and we have schools from Ohio joining but we also have non-Catholic "Same thing with lacrosse: It was just us, Marian, and Cranbrook schools in our league too," Malinowski said. "In our faith in general, so it was a three-team league and you were playing the same teams 2-3 we're supposed to be welcoming and that is kind of what we are doing. times. Now, by adding schools of those sizes, we're able to add competi-



Catholic League Additions Travel Time

Where we are	Destination	Estimated Travel time
Mercy High School	Notre Dame Academy	1 hr 10 min
Mercy High School	St. Ursula Academy	1 hr 15 min
Mercy High School	Central Catholic High School	1 hr 15 min

tion by having them come up here and play with us. So the biggest reason was to have more schools to create fairness across all the divisions," Malinowski said

FUTURE PLANS FOR THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE AND BEYOND.

Consisting of 33 private schools, the Catholic League is the largest Catholic sports league in the United States. With this expansion and size of the league, there are bound to be questions about whether any other schools would have a chance at joining the league in the future. While the Catholic League is not actively seeking for new members, they are always open to the possibility of conversations with new schools.

"The staff of the Catholic League would have conversations with other potential members, but at the end of the day, we would present it to the Executive Athletic board and they would be the ones to make the decision," Evoy said. "We are not actively pursuing increased membership.²

As for Mercy Athletics, there will continue to be discussion about travel for teams seeking more competition. In order for student athletes to prepare more for playoffs, get more looks at recruiting, and improve

as a team, they must have the opportunity to compete at a high level against competition that cannot always be found in Southeast Michigan or even the state of Michigan.

"For a really long time, you could only go so far and there were travel restrictions, but now [MHSAA] is kinda opening those up. So it's definitely something that I've talked to with certain coaches and certain sports," Malinowski said.

A RESPONSE TO CRITICISM ABOUT THE DECISION.

The Catholic League has faced a lot of criticism surrounding this decision from complaints about transportation to increased competition despite not necessarily making the decision. There is not doubt that there are both pros and cons to this decision, but ultimately, many have hopes that it will bring a new perspective to the league.

They were in a tough spot and they needed a league to play in."

With change comes growth, but also challenges. The Catholic League has faced all of this head on despite the criticism and understands that people will need time to adjust.

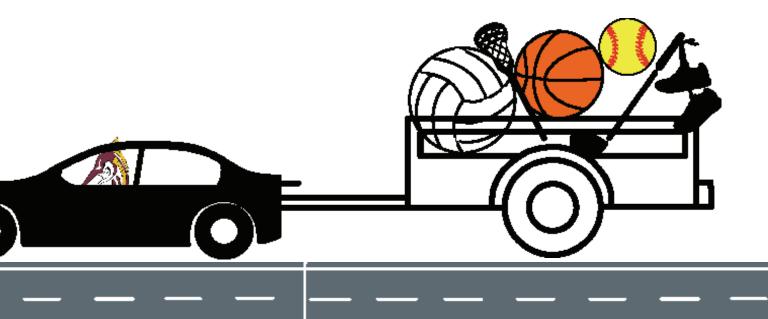
"I think that part of the criticism comes from the fact that it is something new. And with change, there's always



the opportunity for growth and reflection and that's not easy for people," Evoy said. "It's all about perspective but it's our job to look at it from 10,000 feet up and look at the entire landscape, not just a particular team or school."

Regardless of complaints and negative views, the addition of these teams brings the Catholic League team into a new era as it continues to be the largest Catholic sports league in the United States, expanding its reach into new territories

Seven Mercy Athletics teams have been or will be affected by this change including volleyball, cross country, golf, basketball, softball, lacrosse, and track



Focus: Hope partners with Mercy to make a difference

STORY AND GRAPHICS: MEGAN SULLIVAN

Focus: Hope could not have been more aptly named. The organization has been a staple of Southeastern Michigan for over 50 years, providing service and "Hope" with a "Focus" on those in need of assistance. With unwavering determination, Focus: Hope focuses on empowering the Detroit community to overcome racism, poverty and injustice through programs including early learning and youth development, education, workforce training and food for seniors.

Focus: Hope emerged in 1968, when food disparities in Detroit reached critical levels. Grocers began sending expired and outdated food from the suburbs back into the city while charging even more. This issue, combined with excess food often being thrown out, turned Detroit into a food desert with limited high quality food for its residents.These leaders had a bold yet inspiring vision: to create a society where everyone had access to food, no matter what their economic status is.

Witnessing this growing crisis, Michigan natives decided to do something about it. Under the leadership of Eleanor M. Josaitis and Father William T. Cunningham, the organization Focus: Hope was born.

Elderly people are the main recipients of Focus: Hope's work, but why are they having food issues in the first place? Many elderly people suffer from food shortages due to low social security benefits. When someone works a job "under the table," or off the record, their labor goes unaccounted for and thus, no taxes are paid. Unfortunately, this makes the social security income of these workers low, oftentimes too low to buy enough food. Another factor is that many are not in the condition to travel to the grocery store without aid, leaving them unable to buy groceries.

'We are helping bridge the gap and making sure that they have healthy nutritious food" said Holly Markiecki-Bennetts, the director of Mercy's annual Focus:



In the year 2021, Focus Hope distributed food boxes to 41,201 seniors each month.



Hope Food Drive.

"The number of people that are served by Focus Hope food is outrageous—it's astronomical. It's over 41 thousand senior citizens a month. That's more seats than comerica park" said Markiecki-Bennetts.

However, Focus: Hope doesn't stop at supplying food. One of the main goals of the organization is the opposition to economic and racial inequalities as Focus: Hope was formed in revolt of the Detroit Riots, a period of unrest between the predominantly black neighborhoods of Detroit and the white police officers. Seeing the rise of this violence and injustice, Father Cunningham and Eleanor Josaitis created an organization not only to address hunger, but all kinds of injustice and inequality, and they do this through their various programs serving all people.

One of these programs is the early development program where Focus: Hope provides education for children starting at six weeks old up to five years old. By equipping these young learners with essential skills, Focus: Hope ensures they are well-prepared for kindergarten and future education, enabling children from all backgrounds to thrive academically.

"It is proven that kids that are in a headstart do better in their whole educational career versus the kids who don't." said Focus: Hope worker, Christian Harper. .

Focus: Hope's reach doesn't end with children as it extends to adults as well. Focus: Hope provides aid to these people through their several workforce training programs, classes on various fields of work, equipping adults with the necessary skills for industries ranging from IT to tree trimming. "We help connect people with careers that will afford them to have a better future. When they graduate the program, we keep in contact with them and help them get jobs" said Harper.

Aside from these programs, Focus: Hope operates through its extensive network of dedicated volunteers. These volunteers assist by collecting boxes of donated food and delivering it to those in need.

"Volunteers come and deliver the boxes to homebound senior citizens, so this food will go right to senior citizens for their holiday which is pretty cool." said Markiecki-Bennetts.

Another crucial element in helping Focus: Hope continue their mission is the generous donors. Among the many donors of Focus: Hope, Mercy is an important partner, hosting a Focus: Hope food drive every year. As a member of the Mercy community, it is important to appreciate how a seemingly small contribution can positively impact the lives of those in our own community. Mercy's involvement with Focus Hope has been ongoing for over 20 years, demonstrating that Mercy has a pivotal role in putting food on thousands of plates.

"When I talk to my friends at Focus: Hope, they have told me that we are one of their long standing partnerships" said Markiecki-Bennetts.

As time passes, the impact of Focus: Hope has continued to grow as more lives are affected by the generosity of founders and the network of volunteers which continue their message today.

The cast of Frozen takes on the Big Apple story and graphics: MICAH ROGERS



U.S. of "Frozen" participants gather on the set of Good Morning America on Sunday November 26. Mercy, along with 50 other schools, were granted the rights to perform the stage production of Frozen last year. Due to this, they had the opportunity to travel to New York City to showcase their talent. Photo courtesy of Shelley Bajorek.

Last year, the Mercy community was brought together by a special announcement: Mercy's Performing Arts department would be the first in Michigan to produce Disney's "Frozen". Now, this declaration is finally starting to come into fruition as the spring musical approaches.

"We've had lots of opportunities with this win," Mercy performing arts teacher and "Frozen" director Mrs. Shelley Bajorek said.

Mercy was chosen to produce "Frozen" through a selective video application process. This process was called The United States of Frozen and was sponsored by Music Theatre International in collaboration with Disney. The company was tasked with handpicking one high school in every state and the territory of Puerto Rico to obtain licensing for "Frozen", making Mercy one of only 51 high schools in the United States chosen for this opportunity.

Naturally, such an accomplishment has opened many doors for Mercy performing arts. On Thanksgiving weekend, students involved in the musical traveled to New York City to perform live on Good Morning America.

"We're going to Good Morning America to showcase what we're doing," cast member Elise Lowry said.

The other schools selected to perform their own production of "Frozen" were also in attendance on GMA, whether in person or virtually. The various departments came together to demonstrate their collective efforts and broadcast their talents, giving high school theater participants around the country a chance in the limelight.

"It gives a really good opportunity to not only the people singing, but also me and the assistant stage managers," stage manager Hannah Kennedy said. The Good Morning America atmosphere is a great example of the 'showbusiness' lifestyle that many drama students are enamored by. With a 5 am call time, extra rehearsals and plenty of excited spectators and viewers, performers are thrust into the world of TV production for a day. This unique occasion allows students to share the stage with high-profile names and experience the inner workings of large scale productions.

"Meeting the other students and teachers and collaborating with them is going to be really exciting," Bajorek said.

New York is known for its inspirational nature, and Mercy students can benefit greatly from this on their trip. The 51 schools represent how diverse the world of performing arts is, creating a forum for new ideas through "Frozen". Good Morning America brought these schools together to intensify the community they have created through being winners of the United States of "Frozen" contest. Mercy will be able to use what they have learned from other schools while also serving as a model to other theater programs.

"I gained a sense of professionalism, you have to have a sense of maturity to navigate New York," Lowry said.

Overall, Mercy's trip to New York City added an extra layer of exposure to their theater experiences.

This invitation to Good Morning America unlocks an entirely new level of promotion, recognition, and opportunity for this outstanding theater department. As they continue to spread the gift of "Frozen," this cast is certainly one to watch out for.

Frozen begins showing in March and will span two weekends: March 15th-17th and March 22nd-24th.

December Athletics Calendar

