

New life: Marquette seniors plant a tree in honor of Zachary Hunter

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - More than a year ago, the Marquette Catholic High School family lost one of its own when 16-year-old Zachary Hunter was killed in a car crash on April 17, 2016.

While his friends and fellow students have honored his memory many times in many ways since that tragic day, and some of his organs were able to give life to others, the Marquette Catholic Class of 2017 decided to honor Hunter through planting new life at Gordon Moore Park. During a special ceremony on the morning of Friday, April 28, 2017, Hunter's class prayed together before planting a magnolia tree near the tennis courts.

Marquette Catholic High School Campus Minister Paula Mattix-Wand gave each of the students assembled a small bag of "ceremonial dirt," which they were invited to place around the tree after students and workers from the Alton Parks and Recreation Department placed the new tree in a previously-dug hole.

"Zack played tennis," Mattix-Wand said. "This isn't our home court, but they are doing renovations to it, and it will look wonderful. These students did the painting of the clubhouse."

The new magnolia was placed near the newly-painted tennis clubhouse at Gordon Moore Park. The painting for most of the building was done by seniors at Marquette as part of their Senior Mission Week. During the last week, seniors from the Catholic high school have been donating their time and service to help the community. The week reminds them of the school's motto of the Latin *serviam*, meaning "I will serve."

During the mission week, seniors are out of school so they may take their normal classroom hours and dedicate them to helping the community. During the week, which used to send students to impoverished areas of Mexico to build adequate housing, students are invited to work together for one, big service project for the city as well as various smaller ones. Besides painting the clubhouse, students also worked together to paint five homes, and were going to deliver "blessing baskets" to each resident following the tree planting ceremony.

Father Bill Kessler, the Marquette Catholic High School Chaplain, and former Marquette student himself, led the tree planting prayer service, reciting the Lord's Prayer with students and reading the much-quoted passage from the Gospel of St. John in which Jesus says the greatest love is giving one's life for another.

After praying together, most of the 109 students in the Class of 2017 put their small bag of dirt into the hole around the tree and gathered around it to celebrate their friend, who Kessler assured was "among them in spirit," despite not being able to be there physically.

The tree was provided by the Marquette Catholic High School Class of 2017 at the cost of \$100 for both the tree and the city's labor digging the hole. Almost all of the trees at Gordon Moore Park are planted in memory of someone. Hunter's joins a line of beautifully-blooming magnolias near the tennis courts.

