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Julia Wagner '18 to present research on Capitol Hill in April

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By: Mark Tarnacki

English major Julia Wagner '18 of South Burlington, VT, learned this week that her research about a pioneering World-War II-era female shipyard welder with Saint Michael's connections, Peggy Citarella, has been accepted for the prestigious and highly competitive national Posters on the Hill exhibit in Washington, D.C., April 25-26, 2017.



Julia Wagner, left, with Peggy Citarella. Below left, Julia on a ship at the Charlestown Navy Yard when she presented her research there this past summer.

A Posters on the Hill representative emailed Wagner on Wednesday to notify and congratulate her on being chosen as one of just 60 posters that will be presented out of more than 300 competitive applications. Wagner's poster submission, based on summer research funded by a grant from the Saint Michael's Vice President for Academic Affairs office, is titled "Not Ordinary and Not Nice: The First Female Welder at the Charlestown Navy Yard during WWII," and is about the wife of longtime Saint Michael's humanities professor and soccer coach, the late Armand "Doc" Citarella. "Doc" was at the College 51 years and died in 2015.

Wagner presented her work both at last year's Saint Michael's Academic Symposium in the spring and at a special program at the Charlestown Navy Yard in Boston this summer when the Yard was celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the National Park Service with a special series of events on the role of women workers there. The previous summer, Julia had been awarded the undergraduate research grant by the College to complete an oral history of Peggy Citarella, now age 96, who was the first woman welder at the Boston Navy Yard during WWII. A park ranger from the Yard heard about her research and invited her to present during their two-day extravaganza. Each invitation is a chance to share a great story, according to Wagner.

"I'm truly honored to present my research at a national conference in Washington, D.C.," Wagner said. "It's a wonderful opportunity to share Peggy Citarella's story to an even wider audience. I hope that I can bring greater awareness to the hard work and dedication of thousands of women that contributed vitally to the successful end of World War II. Peggy is one of many outstanding women, but her accomplishments throughout the war certainly put her above the rest and deserves the long overdue recognition."

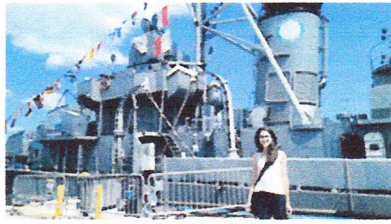
Wagner explained that she met Peggy Citarella when Wagner was a junior at Burlington's Catholic Rice High School. "She had put out an advertisement at my school to help move and organize some items around her house. I worked with her for two years, during which time she would tell me stories of her life.

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Saint Michael's College delivers a compelling, world-class education in a beautiful Vermont setting. Our connected community allows students to form close relationships with each other and accomplished faculty members, providing an ideal learning environment where they have the space and support to challenge themselves and their peers. As a fully residential college located minutes from Burlington, one of the country's top-rated college towns, Saint Michael's offers an unparalleled mix of academic, spiritual, cultural, service and wilderness experiences.

Her time as a welder at the Charlestown Navy yard stood out the most," Wagner said.



"I met with Professor George Dameron, a colleague of Peggy's husband, Professor Emeritus Armand Citarella, and Professor Dameron suggested that I record Peggy's story," Wagner continued. "I then pursued the VPAA grant to formalize and fund my research. Since then, I have presented my research for Saint

Michael's alumni and at the Academic Symposium at Saint Michael's College, as well as at the National Parks Service in Boston where my research will be archived."

Karen Talentino, vice president for Academic Affairs, said she was "absolutely thrilled about the selection of Julia's research poster for the prestigious 2017 Posters on the Hill. She received the VPAA summer research grant for this project when she was just a sophomore, and the resulting paper reflected insightful and comprehensive research coupled with very strong writing skills."

"Saint Michael's College has a very good track record with this program, which promotes and highlights the very best undergraduate research on the national level," Talentino said, "We will be pleased to send Julia to D.C. for the poster presentation, accompanied by her faculty mentor on this research project, Professor Susan Ouellette, Department of History."

Angela Irvine, the College's director for foundation relations and sponsored programs, said another Saint Michael's student selected to present for Posters on the Hill was Shelby Knudson '15, an education and English major, who two years ago showed her project titled "Narrowing the Literacy Achievement Gap: Increasing Third and Fourth Grade Boys' Motivation to Read" to Washington. Knudson's visit that year included visits with members the Vermont Congressional delegation.

"This is a big deal for us," said Irvine, "because Julia's research project involves a lot of important Saint Michael's College history, including our military veterans, anyone who knew Doc Citarella as a professor or coach over half a century, and then also the spirit of this community's many pioneering women considering that Peggy Citarella was the first female welder for the U.S. Navy."

Wagner's academic adviser for her English major is Elizabeth Inness-Brown of the English faculty. Julia Wagner's mother is Joan Wagner, the College's director of community-engaged learning and coordinator of experiential learning. Julia is active with Saint Michael's College Fire and Rescue.

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WHO IS ST. MICHAEL?

Not Ordinary and Not Nice

by Lauren N. Read

Peggy Citarella's story isn't exactly a secret on the Saint Michael's campus. It's hard to ignore the person who was the first female welder at the Charlestown Navy Yard during World War II. Unfortunately, Citarella's groundbreaking story was more of a local legend. That is about to change, thanks to the work of Julia Wagner '18.

"Talking to congressmen and other representatives about her story, her impact," Wagner

Female Welder at the Charlestown Navy Yard during WWII." The South Burlington resident approached Saint Michael's Professor George Dameron about the opportunities for the project and received funding from the Vice President of Academic Affairs Summer Research Grant to pursue the work.

Wagner's project received national recognition after being accepted for Posters on the Hill, an exhibit in

anniversary of the National Park Service. "It's always fascinating to hear the 'first woman welder,'" Wagner says. "The fact that she was the first, the fact that she surpassed so many expectations... just by that token it is something that draws people in."

Wagner, an English major, has long been connected to St. Mike's. Her mother, Joan Wagner, is the director of the Center for Community-Engaged Learning and Coordinator of Experiential Learning at the College. Citarella's husband taught at the school for 51 years and passed away in 2015.

The two met by chance when Wagner was a student at Rice Memorial High School in South Burlington and Citarella needed someone to help her around the house. "She started telling me all sorts of things about her experience in the Navy Yard and how she got to be there," Wagner says. "At the time she was 93, so I realized how important it was to get the story down."

One of Wagner's favorite memories from the now-96-year-old was about how she struggled to find someone to certify her in the profession. After trying various trade schools, she approached the Newton (MA) Trade School. "There was this man there and she asked 'I want

to be a welder; can you teach me?'" Wagner recounts. "He said 'Ordinary, nice girls don't learn to weld.' She said 'Well, I am not nice and I am not ordinary.' He was taken aback and said let's see what this girl can do.

"She has," reported Wagner, "this tenacious spirit that I would love to emulate." Not only did the story intrigue Wagner, but it became the title of her work. "One theme that I noticed the most in her stories is that she had to persevere in almost every facet," Wagner says. "When someone tells you 'no' but you know it's right or that you can make a change in some way, keep going. That's what she did and she excelled."

Now that Wagner has spread Citarella's story from Saint Michael's to Washington, DC, she has been asked to archive her work for the National Park Service — which she hopes to complete this summer — before presenting her work at the Durick Library at Saint Michael's College.

"There was an amazing moment when I was presenting at Alumni Weekend and [Citarella] came," Wagner says. "I did my little piece and... I stepped back and everyone talked to her. She just lit up the room." ☪



Julia Wagner '18 with Peggy Citarella.

says, "was just an amazing opportunity. I am happy to get [her story] out there." Wagner began researching Citarella, the widow of longtime Saint Michael's professor Armand "Doc" Citarella, and published a project called "Not Ordinary and Not Nice: The Story of Peggy Citarella, the First

Washington, DC, that showcases undergraduate research. She presented her project to U.S. representatives on April 25 and 26. The college junior also shared Citarella's story last year at a special program at the Charlestown Navy Yard celebrating the 100th