

# 'Nun' better: Mullen celebrates Sister Brendan



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The way Sister Brendan Jordan saw it, kids growing up surrounded by poverty, gangs and violence in impoverished ghettos of inner-city Denver had two ways out: education or drugs. Years ago, while serving as assistant principal of Denver's Mullen High School, God put a message on her heart: she should help these children by educating them.

"It was something that had to be done," said Sister Jordan. "Some of these youngsters came in and we knew they weren't ready for the challenges of college prep school."

To meet the challenges, she proposed a program revolving around smaller classes and a progressive curriculum of study skills to the Christian Brothers running the Lasallian prep school. Since 1988, her De LaSalle program has addressed the needs of students who, while deficient in certain basic skills, had the potential to succeed at Mullen.

Sister Jordan is proud of the students and alumni of the program. Many have continued their education with multiple degrees and become doctors, lawyers, educators and other respected professionals.

"That was my passion ... I wanted these youngsters to succeed," she said. "When they come back and thank me, I say: 'Don't thank me, thank yourself.'"

Nearly 100 members of the school community gathered Jan. 6 for a Mass and reception to celebrate her life and ministry. Sister Jordan, a member of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, turned 90 on Jan. 3. She has served at Mullen since 1976, following several years teaching in Ohio and Arizona.

"Sister Brendan ... personifies the values and virtues of Lasallian education," said principal Janell Kloosterman. "This includes the De La Salle program she founded."

One of the students that originally inspired the program: Tommy Watson, class of 1992, flew in from Charlotte, N.C., to surprise her at the celebration.

"Before I started attending Mullen, I was living in a 10-by-6-foot motel room with eight other people," he said. "Six of the adults in the room were drug addicts; my two younger siblings and I had to basically take care of ourselves."

Growing up in that chaos in Denver's Five Points neighborhood, the place he went to for peace was the basketball court. Success in sports was how he ultimately met Mullen football coach Peter Levine when he was in eighth grade.

"When I arrived, my comrades and I from the inner-city were not on par with the entering ninth-graders regarding our academics," said Watson, who took three different busses to get to the school at



Sister Brendan Jordan, longtime educator at Mullen High School, with former students at a Jan. 6 reception celebrating her 90th birthday, from left: Desmond Davis '92, Tommy Watson '92 and Roman Hollowell '97.

3601 S. Lowell Blvd.

That's when Sister Jordan and her De La Salle program stepped in.

"Sister Brendan became our homeroom teacher," Watson said. "She is an amazing teacher and person."

A former school principal and today, a motivational speaker, coach and consultant, Watson holds a doctorate of education. He has also authored a book "A Face of Courage" about overcoming the odds of growing up with physical abuse, abandonment and heroin-addicted parents.

Nine of the original 15 students in the De La Salle program hold Ph.Ds., according to Sister Jordan. Some of the alumni have children who are entering high school and applying to Mullen.

"I feel the circle is complete when those men bring their children in for an interview," Sister Jordan said.

Well past a typical retirement age, she continues to work at Mullen as an academic advisor. "I just keep going, I've always loved school," said the educator who holds three advanced degrees.

That love for education is reflected in her students.

"Sister Brendan has meant the world to me," Watson said. "And she has played a significant role in me being Dr. Tommy A. Watson from the Five Points area of Denver, Colorado."

## Mardi Gras Gala 2014

Sister Brendan Jordan will also be honored at Mullen High School's annual gala.

When: March 1, starts at 5:30 p.m.

Where: Grand Hyatt Denver, 1750 Welton St., Denver

Registration: \$150

Register or questions: [www.mullenhigh.com](http://www.mullenhigh.com)