More Than a BBQ: Where Connections Came Back to Life

Event Recap

May 05, 2026

May 3rd Jon and Marie Fidero transformed their home into a gathering place where Ave Maria University's extended family reconnected, laughed, and relived some of their favorite moments. Many alumni accepted the Fideros' warm invitation to their Mid-Atlantic Alumni BBQ, an event that turned out to be far more meaningful than the delicious food and festive pony rides might suggest. The warm spring sun shined bright as guests mingled across the sprawling property, the conversations that unfolded revealed something special: a community bound together by shared mission and transformative experiences that transcend geography and time.

The group represented the full spectrum of the Ave Maria University family, with alumni from all three campuses spanning multiple generations of graduates. Whether they had walked the halls at the Vineyards, been part of the pioneering classes in Michigan, or studied at the current Ave Maria campus, these graduates carried with them the same spirit that defines our university. As old friends embraced and new connections were made, there was a palpable sense of belonging and a reminder that Ave Maria's mission extends far beyond the classroom and into the lifelong bonds that alumni forge with one another.

Rev. Mark Rutherford and Jon seized the opportunity to share a powerful story about the 2004 Daytona Spring Break Mission trip, speaking to the profound impact these experiences have on both those being served and the Ave students doing the serving. Early Ave students piled into vans, tackled the long drive from MI to Daytona, and camped out while witnessing to the Daytona spring break crowd. They recounted a moving moment when one imposing spring breaker, who stated he had witnessed a Mass but was not Catholic, shared his experience of being unexpectedly moved during Mass as the priest elevated the Eucharist. The man was struck by a peace he couldn't quite explain a grace that invited him to open his heart to the transformative power of the Blessed Sacrament. Through patience and genuine witness, Ave students were able to share how the Eucharist works in our lives—a beautiful reminder that evangelization happens most powerfully through authentic encounter and humble service.

As the afternoon drew to a close and guests began their journeys home, the true success of the gathering became clear: these weren't just old friends reuniting over pulled pork and coleslaw. This was a living expression of Ave Maria's charism—a community of faith committed to seeking truth, living virtue, and bringing Christ to the world. The Fideros' generosity in opening their home created space for those bonds to be strengthened and renewed, leaving everyone who attended reminded of why they chose Ave Maria University and what they continue to carry with them long after graduation.

The Fidero's have generously offered to make this an annual event so we hope to see you in Front Royal on May 15, 2027. Watch the Events section for registration as we enter spring.

Read online for photos and videos:

https://alumni.avemaria.edu/news/more-than-a-bbq-where-connections-came-back-to-life-1778000082084