A photograph of a smiling woman with dark hair, wearing a black top, carrying a young girl with braided hair on her shoulders. The girl is wearing a white t-shirt and is also smiling. They are in front of a white house with a gabled roof. The background is slightly blurred, showing other houses and a clear sky.

# THE MOUNT

Mount St. Mary's College Magazine • Los Angeles • Fall 1999

Defining the  
Board's Role

**A House  
Blessing**

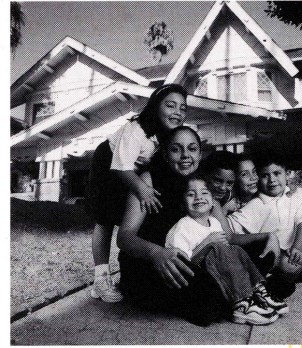
Ambassador Wells

Honor Roll of Donors

# A House Blessing

Mount student Vicky Lopez '00 helps change lives at Alexandria House.

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# Validating the Mission, Challenging Us to Fulfill It

Board Chair Sister Jill Napier, C.S.J. '71,  
describes her vision of the role of the Mount's trustees.

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# To Estonia with Love...and Service

Two alums visit Ambassador Melissa Foelsch Wells  
at the United States Embassy in the Republic of Estonia.

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# Honor Roll of Donors

The Mount is extremely grateful to its donors. One small way in which we show our appreciation is by acknowledging those who gave generously to the College during the year.

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ON THE COVER: Vicky Lopez '00 with her student, Jose.  
See story on page 6. PHOTO BY RICK MENDOZA.

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# To Estonia with



(Left to right) Barbara Dobrott Stapleford, Ambassador Melissa Foelsch Wells and Mary Frances Ross Kasimatis meet again in the United States Embassy in Estonia.

# Love...and Service

BY BARBARA DOBROTT STAPLEFORD '54

**In July, along with Mary Frances Ross Kasimatis '54 and our husbands, I began the first leg of a European journey at the United States Embassy in the Republic of Estonia by visiting our dear friend, Ambassador Melissa Foelsch Wells.**

Mary Frances and I met Melissa at Saint Monica's Grammar School and it is no surprise to us that her early dreams of public service have been achieved to such an extraordinary degree. The daughter of an opera singer and a brilliant physicist, she was born in Tallinn, Estonia, and arrived in California as a young child. In the eighth grade, when most of us were struggling to understand current events, Melissa was discussing global politics. When we tried to memorize maps of European countries, she had already been to many of them.

After graduating from Saint Monica's High School, the three of us attended Mount St. Mary's College. Melissa has always attributed her success to the Mount because it was there that she learned that a woman could do anything.

Our small, caring college also gave her the opportunity to select and excel in specific course work that led to her matriculation into the foreign service school at Georgetown University. She received her B.S. in this program in 1956, the first woman ever to achieve this, and in 1991, was honored by that university with an honorary doctorate degree.

During her foreign service career, she had two assignments in Brazil, and served in France, the United Kingdom, Trinidad and Tobago, Switzerland, and Uganda. She was United States Ambassador to Zaire, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Cape Verde, and held several posts within the United Nations.

We remained friends throughout the years, and she always invited us to visit her wherever she was assigned. Now we were together in Estonia and I still muse over my initial naïve question: "So Melissa, do you go into the office most days?"

Over meals in the embassy dining room, on china bearing the official seal of the United States, we learned that Ambassador Wells works 55 to 70 hours a week with total dedication and joyful zest for her mission to this developing country, which emancipated itself from Soviet control in 1991. She is studying Estonian and finds this assignment, to which she was named in October 1998, particularly meaningful as it has brought her back to the country of her birth. She also speaks French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish!

To me, the most impressive part of our visit came from following her daily activities, a multitude of business and social interactions directed toward representing the United States' interests in Estonia and the Baltic area. While we were there, she met with the Israeli ambassador, had conferences with various Estonian officials and representatives of local business interests and supervised while her staff prepared an Independence Day party for 500 guests.

Mount alums can take great pride in Melissa's amazing success. She is a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, with the rank of Career Minister.

During our five-day stay, we had great pleasure meeting her husband, Alfred W. Wells, a retired architect, hearing about the couple's two sons, and reminiscing about our high school and Mount days. We left Estonia enriched and inspired by our friend's energy and dedication to her work. **M**

Note: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania border the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea and comprise the Baltic States. Formed in 1918, they remained independent republics until their involuntary incorporation in 1940 into the USSR.

The United States never recognized the forcible incorporation of Estonia and the other Baltic republics into the Soviet Union. Following the restoration of Estonian independence on August 21, 1991, the United States opened its embassy in Tallinn on September 4, 1991. To follow Ambassador Wells' work, see [www.usislib.ee/wells.html](http://www.usislib.ee/wells.html); to read more about the Republic of Estonia, see [www.usislib.ee/mission.html](http://www.usislib.ee/mission.html).