

Webster Groves to West Point

"A leader among her peers," Amelia Janoski prepares to graduate from the United States Military Academy

by Linda Briggs-Harty
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Webster Groves resident Amelia Janoski may not be the only woman cadet at West Point, but she surely is one of the most impressive.

A senior, ready to graduate in May, she's taken not only her West Point instructors, sponsors and coaches by storm but also left an impression of excellence at the College School and MICDS, where she received her elementary and secondary education.

Janoski is the first MICDS female graduate to receive a West Point appointment.

"She is a leader among her peers, respected by fellow cadets, teachers and coaches for her leadership, selflessness, maturity and good humor. She's fun to be around - self-confident, yet self-deprecating. Amelia is a remarkable young lady," said her faculty sponsor, Brigadier General Patrick Finnegan, dean of the West Point Law School.



Amelia Janoski with her father, Frank Janoski, with their West Point freshman-year photographs. Amelia's is from 2005, her dad's from 1970. photo by Diana Linsley

His words aren't fluff: Janoski made the Dean's List every semester at West Point. She played varsity soccer throughout, earning acclaim with the others when the team competed in the NCAA women's soccer tournament for the first time in school history.

Her soccer coach and chemistry teacher at MICDS, Christopher Sellers, had much the same thoughts as Finnegan about Amelia's high school performance.

"Amelia was a joy to coach," Sellers said. "She made every day an adventure with her relentless aggression and fierce competitiveness.

"The classroom was no different. She enthusiastically challenged everything with vigor," said Sellers.

But this cadet has an even more devoted fan: her father, Frank Janoski.

A West Point graduate himself (Class of 1974) and now a St. Louis-based attorney, Janoski has watched his daughter's progress from adventurous girl to distinguished cadet.

He and mom Deb were there when Amelia came back from College School outings - exploring the Everglades, hiking the Smoky Mountains, studying the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia.

He was there at endless MICDS soccer games, when Amelia honed her lean/mean style.

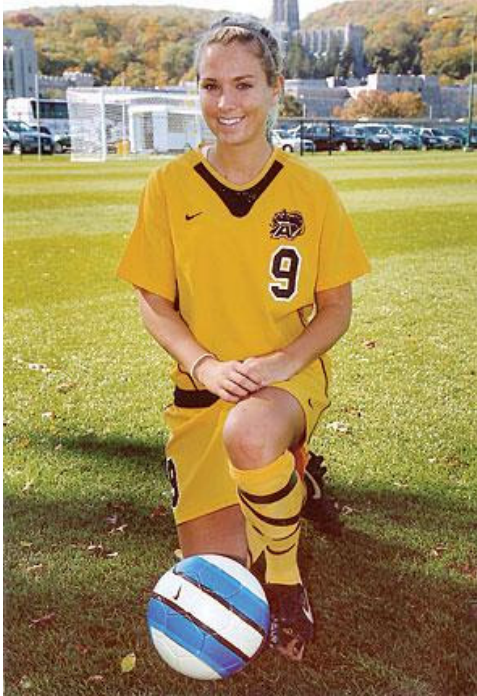
He was there (and she for him) when Deb Janoski died of a brain aneurysm during Amelia's sophomore year at West Point.

"For many other college students, a traumatic loss like this would have sent them into a tailspin. Amelia came back even stronger. Though clearly mourning the loss of her mother and struggling with that at times, she finished her sophomore year remarkably well and has continued that trend in her final two years," said West Point sponsor Brigadier General Finnegan.

Dad Frank Janoski praised Amelia with abandon.

"She's done much better there than I did," he said. "I have some concerns for her welfare in the Army, but the Army doesn't put people in situations for which they haven't been prepared. She's well trained."

Amelia majored in engineering management at West Point - one of the more rigorous options. Since she stayed beyond sophomore year, she'll spend five years in the army as an officer. Military intelligence is her post-graduate army emphasis.



Janoski played soccer all four years at West Point. Her team competed in the NCAA women's soccer tournament for the first time in school history. courtesy of Amelia Janoski

By any standards, a West Point appointment is prestigious. Only 1,350 candidates are chosen from among 15,000-plus applicants. Various reviews rank the academy among the top universities in the country.

Women cadets number about 17 percent of the student body - the academy opened its doors to women in 1976.

Amelia laughed and said though he was in favor of it later, her dad was leery about her entering West Point when she was younger.

"That's because it had been primarily a combat arms school," Frank Janoski said. "The Army has opened many other opportunities since my time there."

The school that boasts of being the oldest occupied military post in America and includes renowned alums like Ulysses Grant, Robert E. Lee, John J. Pershing, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, Alexander Haig, Jr. et al, has changed a bit over the last decades, said the elder Janoski.

"It was easier to focus on academics and athletics during my college years, because correspondence came only through the mail. On weekends, we stood in line to use a pay phone, and we received visitors only on Saturday night after religious services," said Frank Janoski.

He praised the cadets who excel these days, despite modern distractions, such as cell phones, computers and the array of digital media.

"The cadets must be far more disciplined than we were to succeed," he said.

She expects to join the 82nd Airborne Unit, of which her boyfriend, a 2007 West Point grad, is a member. Amelia wants to enroll in the Army-sponsored FLEP (Funded Legal Education Program) and become a military lawyer.

"The experience at West Point has been amazing," said Amelia. "I've gotten to do things others can't do at typical colleges - flying in helicopters, rappelling, drilling, marching in parades, handling weapons, to name a few activities. I've regularly seen distinguished visitors from all over the world."

President Barack Obama and Vice President Joseph Biden will be the speakers at graduation ceremonies in May, Amelia said.

As part of her West Point adventure, Amelia travelled abroad for soccer tournaments and went to Hawaii last summer for a military internship. During the Hawaii stint, she shadowed a second lieutenant and helped with military communications.

Home from Hawaii, she interned with the St. Louis Cardinals, aiding stadium operations and marketing efforts.

This spring, she returned to her hometown with fellow cadet and Ballwin native Danny Henry to help recruit area high school students to West Point

Societal impressions of cadets were negative during his West Point stint, due to the effects of the Vietnam War, Frank said.

Amelia and other cadets know positive regard, he said. Merchants and others in the New York area give them with all sorts of freebies and perks.

One thing Frank - and now Amelia - relish is the lasting bond shared by the West Point graduates, known widely as "the Long Grey Line."

"The mental and physical demands we all went through unite us. It doesn't matter if someone is from the Class of 1952 or 2003, we share the same point of reference," said Frank.

Amelia is humble about her stellar status.

"We're about to be demoted, as we graduate and begin our five-year commitment to the army. We have to start all over again," she said.

She can count on one thing through it all - her dad and fellow West Point graduate will be her greatest ally.



Amelia Janoski in uniform (her junior-year photo).
courtesy of Amelia Janoski

Source: Webster-Kirkwood Times

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