I am happy to be joined up here tonight by Board of Trustees member Mike McLanahan, who with his wife Astride received this award last year. Mike has chaired every campaign to advance intercollegiate athletics at the Mount since before we built the playing field complex, and it is exactly right that he stands with me to present this award.

The Walker Award is named in honor of Ray and Louise Walker who made a $100K donation so that MAC could build its first athletic fields, and who have been friends to the College ever since. Ray celebrated his 100th birthday last year, in honor of the occasion we made him an honorary captain at Mt Aloysius--of the ski team! It’s true we don’t have one, but Ray skied right into his 90s, so maybe we will get there someday too.

The Walkers were the first benefactors of athletics at the Mount. The award named for them goes tonight to a group who we can say with absolute certainty represent the first sports fans to ever set foot on this campus—the Sisters of Mercy. A few words about the current band of Sisters that turn up at sports events here at the college.

First, the Sisters are real fans, not just occasional visitors. They have been watching sports teams up here on the mountaintop since we started sports here, in other words for decades. Michele and I have watched dozens of games here with them, in just about every sport we have. I have to say that I think they are partial to basketball—at least three of them used to be basketball players (and one of those right here on this campus).

Second, the Sisters are true fans, at least in my experience with them. Take Sister Helen Marie--Sister Helen Marie is as fervent in the stands as she is in her morning prayers. She is not shy about disagreeing and loudly with what she considers a bad call by the referees. I kid her that it would not look good if a Sister of Mercy got a technical foul at a basketball game--and one of these days it just might happen. Sister Nancy is also a true fan—she roots for her favorite players, like a true New Englander, without apology.
Sister Benedict Joseph views the games like the confident former athlete that she is. She never gets too excited, and relies on the players on the court to get the job done. Sister Giuseppe is true to form tonight—she stays home and prays that the team will win!! And Sister Eric Marie—a tomboy if I ever met one—is never shy about going right on the court and looking up into the face of the very tallest players, and telling them exactly what she expects of them—on and off the court. And she always knows what she is talking about—whether it is a critique of their effort on the court or in the classroom.

We expect—and we get—a lot from the Sisters of Mercy at Mt Aloysius. They are our founders and our inspiration, they are our spiritual leaders and often our teachers, they are our confidents in troubled times and our biggest supporters whether the going is good or bad.

But I don’t think we ever really expect them to be able to sit down with us at play—to enjoy with us as fans the simple acts of running, of hitting a ball across the court, of sliding into home plate, of taking a corner kick, of crossing the finish line, of spiking the ball or of hitting a three pointer—and to enjoy it all so openly, allowing the rest of us in a very real way to embrace the childlike that is so essential to sport and sportsmanship. But they do all of that too.

So from the heart and soul of Mt Aloysius College, its athletic department and all the young men and women who represent us on the field of play, it is my honor to present the 2013 Walker Award to our Sisters of Mercy.