



## OAC Scholar-Athlete-of-the-Month Megan Lutz, John Carroll ★ Cross Country

by Chris Wenzler, JCU Sports Information Director

Oil City, Pennsylvania, is a stone's throw from Franklin and a quick jaunt down the road from Titusville.

It is also a thousand miles from Ecuador.

Megan Lutz felt every bit of that distance when she sat aboard a plane heading toward that South American country in late May of 2010.

"That was my moment of panic," Lutz said as she recounted her first campus ministry immersion experience at John Carroll. "I was thinking what was I doing here."

The girl from a small city halfway between Pittsburgh and Erie, whose graduating class from Venango Catholic High School tallied 27 seniors, and whose fluency in Spanish was beginner level at best, was about to face the challenge of her life.

Just another day in the life of Megan Lutz.

Hailing from a town of just over 10,000 inhabitants, Lutz was and still is proud of her one and only hometown.

"When I go for my run, I will always see some I know," said Megan. "Almost every face is a familiar one, which can be both good and bad. I love seeing them, but it extends the workout because inevitably I'll stop to talk."

It is a place she would love to come back to after graduation, but there was a definitive pull to see the world first.

When it came time to seek out a college, she aimed big, targeting the likes of Notre Dame and Villanova.

Then her mother stumbled upon John Carroll.

"It might be cliché, but when I first stepped on campus for a visit, I fell in love with the place," said Megan. "The people, the size, the academics ... it just felt like where I needed to be."

It also happened to be a good fit for her athletic career. A cross country runner from a high school program which was coached by the local pastor, Lutz and her small-in-number team had often competed against much bigger

schools on a consistent basis. There would be no intimidation factor running at John Carroll.

"My mother was right," Megan said with a laugh. "I really love competing and being on this team. I never would have had that opportunity at a bigger school like the ones I had initially applied to. Being a part of cross country has really been a positive experience in so many ways."



Megan Lutz

Lutz is now a senior and entering the second year of being a team captain. Based on the athletes returning as well as a strong freshman class, she feels very optimistic about the team she will be leading.

"We have great expectations," said Megan. "If everyone commits to putting forth their best effort, to really commit to the team, we could have a very special season. For me, it is about doing the little things right, like getting enough sleep, eating the right way, taking care of our bodies. Those little things add up, and hopefully they add up to big things. We would love to win the OAC, do well at regionals and get to nationals."

When the competitive season ends, Lutz will turn to her life's pursuit of becoming a teacher. She has already done observations, will spend one day per week in the fall in a classroom, after which she will spend the spring semester completing her student teaching requirements before picking up her diploma.

An education major with a 3.97 grade point average, Lutz admits to be chomping at the bit to start her career. "I love how education is the one major where you get a practice year before getting started on your own," said Megan.

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All the while that Lutz has balanced academics and athletics, she has found time to give back, and to whichever community she can offer her benevolence. At first, it was in Oil City, where Venango Catholic required its students to volunteer 25 hours of community service each year. She would teach religious education or get involved in downtown beautification projects.

Then, at John Carroll, she was encouraged to look into what campus ministry had to offer during Sunday masses, and followed through by joining the Christian Life Communities and signing up for immersion experiences. Which eventually put her on that plane to Ecuador. A long way from Oil City.

“Once I landed and we got settled, things got better,” said Megan. “There were some rough spots early ... but it turned out to be an amazing experience.”

Fueled by that first trip, Lutz has since gone to Jamaica

and will be heading down to New Orleans in January.

Lutz admits that her life is “meticulously planned”, and credits her absolute dependency on “to-do lists” as a key to her sanity as well as her success.

At the same time, it is the unexpected moments that nourish her spirit.

On her group’s final full day in the Ecuadorian city of Duran, she was part of a hike that would reach the top of a small mountain that overlooked the city. As she gazed over the place she called home for nine days, she could not help but feel uplifted.

“After the experiences we had gone through, I remember standing there and just being in awe,” said Megan. “This feeling came over me that is hard to describe, but it was just a sense that despite all the challenges I encountered, this is where I was meant to be at this place and time.”