



Courtney Herda: *digital whiz & community builder*

Looking back on her time spent at La Reina High School, Courtney (Pelant) Herda, Class of 2002, recalls her participation in campus activities, an involvement that contributed to the awesome community spirit. As she reminisces, she says she was “wildly involved!” She served as president of the drama club, held a position on the varsity dance team, French club, math club and almost every talent show and spring play. Beginning with her La Reina career in 1996 as a seventh grader, Courtney remembers her relationship with the SNDs. “My first impression was that the SNDs were way cooler than I expected. Imagine my surprise seeing the sisters laughing and having fun, and not being the strict scary persona that I had expected.” It seems like a community spirit evolved from this spirit of joy.

During her time at La Reina, Courtney was privileged to have Sr. Mary Leanne Hubbard as her sophomore morality and social justice teacher, as well as Sr. Antoinette Marie Moon, and Sr. Lisa Megaffin serving as principals. Upon graduation, Courtney went to Vanderbilt University majoring in International Political Economy, French, and Economics. She graduated in three years and pursued a master’s in French from the University of Tennessee.

Over the last 13 years, she has been employed in the digital marketing sector. Gaining experience working for financial guru and syndicated radio host Dave Ramsey and later for E.W. Scripps newspaper group, she then started her own company, Smarter Searches. (See it all at www.smartersearches.com). Courtney’s business is a digital marketing agency, assisting with

her client’s marketing, branding, and public relations needs in an evolving technologically-advanced world. She began her company in her home in October 2012 and currently has six employees at their office in Knoxville, Tennessee. As quoted on the company’s website, “Courtney became fascinated by the search process while in graduate school, trying to maximize her research time by finding what she needed quickly. From that seemingly innocuous beginning, she began a career in digital marketing that has spanned the last 12 years in nearly every field from SEO to PPC to social media to UX and website development. She often lacks a filter when talking about websites and bad marketing ideas, but ultimately cares the most about ensuring her clients’ campaigns are successful.”

Courtney and her husband have been married for 12 years and have two children ages 6 and 8. Both children attend Catholic school. When asked about their education, she says, “Having a balance between strong academic skills and faith formation was important to my husband and me. Something I feel that Catholic education imparts is an incredibly strong sense of community that is just not easily attainable in public or non-religious institutions.” As Courtney continues to share the importance of her Catholic faith, values and education with her children, she will always gratefully remember the community spirit she experienced with La Reina and the SNDs.