Kristina (Tina) Seslija ’10
2015 CSB Benedictine Service Award recipient

“By 2025, I promise Mozaik is going to be recognized as the organization that made the biggest impact on our country. We are changing the unemployment rates, and by 2025, we will lead the development of innovative and entrepreneurial-minded youth.” Tina Seslija ’10 has embraced her position as project manager with Mozaik Foundation, a non-profit which has become a major agent for change in her home country of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Tina came to Saint Bens in 2006 after Dan Whalen, a Saint John’s alum, came to her community offering the opportunity for an American education. “At first we thought ‘Oh great, another foreigner coming to let us know what is best for us,’” recalls Tina. But Dan took a different approach that would change Tina’s life forever. Rather than telling the communities what to do, he asked the young people what they were passionate about, and how they could use those passions to benefit their communities. “That was something we forgot during the war — how to give back to our communities,” Tina explains. “During the war, you just want to survive, after the war you just want to eat. Dan reminded us that there is more.”

Armed with her passion for rebuilding her country, Tina arrived in St. Joseph, Minn., with her husband and two daughters, ages 4 and 10. She wasted no time making the most of her new educational opportunities. She was a political science and peace studies double major, honor student, held two jobs and was involved in numerous on-campus activities, all while she and her family learned to navigate a new culture, language and set of responsibilities. With the help of Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s professors, Tina realized that when she returned to Bosnia, she could accomplish anything as long as she had a dream. And sure enough, that is exactly what she has done. After graduation, Tina returned to Bosnia and began her work with Mozaik, a non-profit dedicated to empowering the young people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and creating a more economically stable and socially strong future.

Tina began as the director of EkoMozaik, a social business owned by Mozaik. Under Tina’s leadership, EkoMozaik built a 5,017 square meter greenhouse that now provides work for over 100 previously unemployed women. For many of them, this was their first time receiving a paycheck, opening a bank account or working with women of another religion. Tina is now working as the project manager for PRO-Future, working to build reconciliation and trust.

Tina has always been a trailblazer for peace and equality and has embraced this mindset at every roadblock she meets. Literally. While working on the EkoMozaik greenhouse, Tina once encountered a tractor parked the middle of the road that was blocking traffic. The other drivers were slowly going around it, but Tina walked right to the woman in front of the tractor and asked her to move it out of the way. The woman replied that driving the tractor was a man’s job and she needed to wait for her male counterpart. This was clearly not a satisfactory response for Tina. “I just got into the tractor with my high heels on and drove it out of the way.” Now that’s a metaphor. But Tina has a different view on overcoming hardships. “It just matters how you see it. I didn’t have any obstacles, just a lot of adventures. And I have enjoyed every one.”

Moving forward, Tina is more than optimistic for her organization. Mozaik has not only empowered women and youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has also had an impact on dozens of CSB/SJU students who have held summer internships there. Students see international growth and development first-
hand, and they are also able to bring new sets of ideas to Mozaik to further its ability to instigate change.

While the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has improved somewhat since 2006, when Tina first came to Saint Ben’s, there is still much work to be done to encourage more cooperation and unity among people of different ethnicities. Tina’s advice to students looking to work in international relations and post-war rebuilding is “peace is possible.” With this outlook, she will continue to serve her country and embrace every adventure with the passion and tenacity that has gotten her this far.