



Edward Rose listens attentively to the advice of Sister Pat Flynn on refinishing a desk for a school in the Southern Tier. Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal



Edward Rose concentrates on cleaning out a groove on the underside of a desk before he starts to paint.

St. Michael's Workshop

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moved to the basement of a nightclub on Joseph and Clifford. Then, some 10 years ago, she relocated to the parish grounds of St. Michael's Church on North Clinton and Clifford Avenues.

There, Sister Pat's willingness to pay the price for her independence was sorely tested. In September 1984, the building at the rear of St. Michael's Church housing the woodshop burned down. A group of older kids had begun to hang around a cubbyhole area there at night — junkies she suspected. When the spot was boarded over to keep them out, she believes one of them retaliated by torching the structure with flaming newspaper. Whatever the cause, she lost everything.

Her voice still carries an edge of bitterness when she recalls asking for diocesan help and being refused because of her unwillingness to go through bureaucratic channels. But rather than giving in to discouragement, she moved across the parking lot to the old St. Michael's school building. It was stripped of plumbing and wiring for heat and electricity, but the building was refitted with heating and lighting fixtures — all work and materials donated. St. Michael's pays the utility bills. In rebuilding, she even found new sources of supplies and tools.

Likewise, she said the shop has been



Sister Pat shares a joke with Bill Fraine who has helped out in the shop for 18 years.

robbed numerous times and she's lost most of her tools more than once. Each time, what was taken has been somehow replaced.

Overall, those incidents leave a sad, lingering awareness that there are people she can't reach. "I don't want to be a savior to anyone," she said, "but there's so much good in people. I guess I just wish I knew more ways to channel it."

Rather than expelling kids from the program for breaking her few simple rules, Sister Pat docks them that day's pay and sends them home until the problem can be worked out. No talking back to each other or touching each other is allowed, and stealing or drugs are forbidden. If a fight occurs 10 minutes before quitting time, she said, both

kids will forfeit the proceeds of their day's work. She believes it's good medicine for the real world of work for which they are preparing.

"My main thrust is to teach them to get along with one another," she said. "It's either shape up or ship out."

One of 11 brothers and sisters, Sister Pat said she grew up in a strict environment. At first, she found it difficult to match her expectations to her kids' backgrounds. "I'd shout at them and they'd shout right back," she remembered. With experience she has learned to provide a little more leeway, but discipline undeniably remains her emphasis.

"Sergeant" is how one of her veteran kids,

Fernando Valasquez, describes Sister Pat. "She's hard on us, but for a reason," he said. His friend, Mike Terrance, added "She doesn't take anything from anybody."

The impact of St. Michael's Woodshop on the people of the surrounding neighborhood stretches beyond merely teaching woodworking or providing summer and after-school jobs. Since most of her materials are donated, Sister Pat is able to apply most of the proceeds from her sales to the community's benefit. She feels lucky to be able to channel jobs and help to those who come to her. "I get all my reward here on earth," she joked. "I'm afraid to see what's waiting for me in heaven."

A stitch in time.

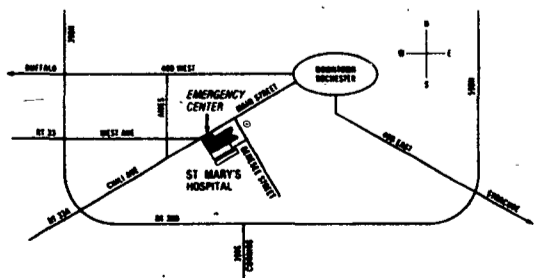
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