

Couple engaged in area ministry 'shares the wealth'

By Linda Quinlan

Many happy years of marriage have given Jim and Donna Fitch an uncommon perspective on the commitment of matrimony. Fortunately for other couples in the Rochester diocese, this enthusiasm enriches the Fitches' uncommon ministry.

"I really believe the Lord has blessed us with the gift of a good marriage," says Donna. "We have our ups and downs...but He calls us to share our gift of love for each other with others."

The Fitches are committed to each other as well as to marriage in general. That dedication helps them "share the wealth" with long-married couples and newlyweds alike.

For five years in the 1970s, the Fitches served as presenters during Marriage Encounter weekends, revealing their life experiences, sharing with others. Then, in 1978, they were approached by Frank and Sue Staropoli, then directors of family life for the Diocese of Rochester. The Staropolis asked Jim and Donna to oversee the area's marriage preparation and marriage enrichment programs. They revamped those programs, and even helped to launch New Horizons, a peer ministry for Catholics about to enter their second marriages.

Appropriately, Jim and Donna Fitch will be celebrating their wedding anniversary this year on Easter Sunday. It'll be their 29th.

It all began in Newark (N.Y.), when Donna was an eighth-grader and Jim a sophomore in the local public school. "She chose me," says Jim with a smile.

Her high school graduation gift was an engagement ring. They were married at St. Michael's Church in Newark, after Jim completed a stint in the service.

One of the things that prepared her for marriage, says Donna, was living independently for that two-year period when Jim was in the service.

With their parents' marriages as models (hers celebrated their 50th anniversary a year and a half ago; his have celebrated their 60th), they were on their way.

"We both came from labor-type families," says Jim. "We learned to be committed to things." In fact, Jim himself has worked from the time he was 12, and began working part-time for Lincoln First Bank when he was a



Jim and Donna Fitch draw from almost three decades of happy marriage, in their ministry to engaged and married couples. Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

senior in high school. Now, he's an assistant vice president and manager of Chase Lincoln First Bank, N.A., and in his 35th year there.

The first 15 years of their marriage produced six children — all boys — and their continued involvement in church and community. "It's like we have several marriages in the one," says Donna. "We started out with the model our parents and society gave us — the woman as the heart of the home and the man as the head of the household...but as we moved away from our families (they moved from Newark to Fairport), we realized there had to

be more to marriage than we were experiencing."

The move took place about 1970, several years after the Second Vatican Council heralded the advent of renewal in the Church. "We were involved in the changes in understanding of what it means to be Church," says Donna. "We lived pre-Vatican II and post...We learned we are Church."

Donna recalls, "I sensed there was more to marriage...We were involved in things, not in each other's lives." As a result of her questioning, she says, a priest suggested they make a marriage encounter.

"The marriage encounter gave us a sense of renewal and discovery of marriage as sacrament," says Jim, who adds that he and Donna began to evolve at that point from breadwin-

Continued on Page 13A

SIMPLICITY, ELEGANCE AND AFFORDABILITY ARE WHAT STRATHALLAN WEDDING PARTIES ARE MADE OF.

This special day rates only the finest. And only Strathallan can give you the finest in accommodations, food and services at truly affordable rates.

From rehearsal dinners of up to 80, to receptions of up to 125 persons, Strathallan handles every detail to make the day a delight.

Our special rates on rooms for wedding parties are priced to please as well. Enjoy wonderful savings when you reserve five rooms or more.

And for the bride and groom? We offer lovely suites for the night with complimentary champagne and complimentary limousine transportation to the airport the following morning.

Please, let us tell you more. Call Strathallan for all the details today.



461-5010
Strathallan
550 East Avenue
Rochester, New York

Remember

DAHNKEN 424-1060

FOR THE BRIDAL PARTY GIFTS

Rosemark
PEWTER TANKARD
\$9.97

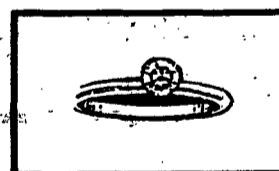
14K GOLD CHAINS

50% OFF LIST
SUPER SALE

Remember

DAHNKEN 424-1060

FOR YOUR ENGAGEMENT RINGS & WEDDING BANDS



DIAMOND SOLITAIRE RINGS
1/4 cwt.....\$299.00
1/2 cwt.....\$399.00
3/4 cwt.....\$799.00
1 cwt.....\$1995.00

Remember

DAHNKEN 424-1060

FOR BRIDE & GROOM GIFTS

SEIKO Pulsar. CITIZEN WATCHES

(Watches In Stock)
25%-40% OFF RETAIL

50% OFF LIST

Samsonite LUGGAGE UP TO

DAHNKEN 424-1060

OPEN MON.-FRI. 10-8:30, SAT. 10-6, SUN. 12-5