

Work camp converts 'Company of Strangers' to friends

Finger Lakes churches combine to support Episcopal parish effort

By Teresa A. Parsons

Last week was the first time in years that Jack Carey got blisters on his hands. He enjoyed it immensely.

The 64-year-old Canandaigua resident usually works as a sales representative. But he spent this past Monday through Friday smashing up old sidewalks with a sledgehammer, loading and dumping cement fragments, and pouring concrete. Nights he spent in a tent.

"It was good for me," he said during a lunch-break on Friday, July 31. "But I never thought I'd grow up to be a hod-carrier."

Carey was one of a dozen members of St. John's Episcopal Church in Canandaigua who abandoned their usual summertime occupations to join a week-long work camp. Not only did participants spend eight hours or more a day making repairs to other peoples' houses, but they each paid \$50 for the privilege. Their contributions were used to pay for supplies used during the week.

Known as the "Company of Strangers," the work camp project originated with the pastor of St. John's, the Rev. James Hubbard, and his wife, Carol Ann. During the past three or four summers, the couple has organized work

camps primarily for teenagers and young adults who belonged to the Hubbards' previous parish in Tennessee. When they moved to Canandaigua last September, they brought the idea with them.

Keith Weaver, 15, said he was drawn to the project by the challenge of a new experience. "You get to know some people, and you get a feeling of accomplishment," he said. "You can help other people by donating money, but you never see what it goes for. This way you can be a part of it."

Ellen Keene, a financial planner, thought the work camp sounded like an interesting way to spend a week. Instead, she found a second family. "You got to know everyone as you would in a family," she said. "Everyone blended together remarkably well."

All but one member of the work crew belonged to St. John's Church. But support for the project crossed denominational boundaries. Each day, a different Canandaigua-area church provided meals for the work camp crew. Many other people who couldn't take part in the work directly sent donations of money, food and other materials.

The Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation, whose director Allyn Smith worships at St. John's, provided grant money to purchase materials. The Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry and area parishes provided the names of people who needed help. Most were elderly women who live alone and who lacked the money, the skills or the strength to do the repairs themselves.

Most of the volunteers were strictly amateurs at home repair. Three teams were organized so that at least one member — usually the team leader — had some experience or knowledge of the task at hand. "We may be inexperienced people, but I think the work we have done is as good as any contractor's," Carol Ann Hubbard said. "We just labored over it longer."

Each team tackled several different projects during the week. The work varied from painting and laying carpet to building ramps for handicapped people. Locations ranged from Canandaigua to Geneva, Victor and Clifton Springs.

Canandaigua resident Tina McGuire was particularly grateful for the group who made part of her house habitable again. During a heavy storm two weeks ago, the ceiling in one of McGuire's front rooms caved in. At the time, the room was filled with donated items scheduled for sale at St. Mary's Parish Festival.

On Thursday, one of the work crews pulled down what remained of McGuire's old ceiling.

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Michael N. Aydogan

Sawing a plank was a pleasant change of pace for the Rev. James Hubbard, pastor of St. John's Episcopal Church in Canandaigua. Rev. Hubbard and his family brought the idea of a work camp with them last fall when they moved to the Finger Lakes.



Canandaigua homeowner Josephine Violanti was more than grateful for painters Karen Walker, Carol Ann Hubbard and Chris Hubbard. Project organizer and team



Chris Hubbard, 16, carefully touched up window trim on Josephine Violanti's house. At other work sites, volunteers constructed ramps for the handicapped, replaced broken sidewalks and repaired a bathroom.