

School marks century of friendship

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Maggie Everhart's voice kept speeding up as she talked about Holy Cross School's Accelerated Reader Program.

"The idea is to win children away from comic books and get them into good books," she said, looking at her son Rob, a fifth-grader at Holy Cross.

Everhart is co-coordinator of the school's ARP, which was one of several programs exhibited at a literacy fair at the Greece Towne Mall Saturday, May 20. The event was sponsored by the Fairport branch of the American Association of University Women.

Everhart's enthusiasm for the ARP extends to the school in which it is housed. Just as ARP turns children towards contemplating weightier literature, so has Holy Cross has turned many a student towards contemplating such weighty issues as faith, hope and service to others.

"The teachers who are there are definitely not there for the money," Everhart said of the Holy Cross faculty. "They believe in the values, and they pass them on."

Handing down values has been the primary focus of the school, which celebrated its 100th anniversary this year. Actually, Holy Cross was founded in 1887, but the parish didn't get around to celebrating its centennial until this year, according to Sister Carolyn Knipper, principal. Organizing the school's celebrations began in 1987, she said, and more legwork had to be done than anticipated before as many alumni as possible could participate.

Despite being a bit behind on the centennial, Holy Cross has done well in creating a warm faith community for its students, parents and alumni. Just ask Mary Ann DeLucenay, a registered nurse who attributes her career choice to the influence of the nuns who taught her there up until her graduation in 1970.

"It was like a little family," DeLucenay remarked. "I guess the feeling of caring came through in my career." DeLucenay noted that she works in the dialysis unit at Rochester General Hospital, a job which often calls her to pray with Catholic patients to alleviate their fears.

Fears of a different kind plagued Michael Whelehan of the class of 1953. His father also attended Holy Cross, and the Sisters of Mercy never let the young Whelehan forget it.

One sister in particular, Sister Mary Clare, would invoke the parental image when chastising the mischievous Whelehan. "I was reminded every day that my father wouldn't do that, my father would've behaved," he recalled.

But the sisters also had a gentler, playful side that impressed Whelehan. "They were our teachers and yet they weren't that far removed from us," he said, recalling one sister who would play football with the boys in the school playground. "She kicked the football further than any of us."

Whelehan also remembered a parish priest, Father William Reed, as a man who "kept an awful lot of us on the straight and narrow." The priest would often take several boys out for a hamburger and a shake, and listened to them as they bared their souls. "You needed that kind of adult advisor that you could look up to," he said.

Rita Foy, who graduated in 1940, looked up to the sisters who taught her so much that she wanted to become one herself. But an older boy had different designs for her life.

"My (future) husband was a year ahead of me," Foy said, but even his fair looks nearly failed to dissuade her from what she thought, was her true vocation. "Even when I was engaged, I was still unsure," she said, because the sisters were "all dedicated young women."

A retreat changed Foy's mind, much to the relief of her future husband, John, who noted that he attributes his sense of right and wrong to the daily teaching of the Sisters of Mercy.

"Most of the teachings would go over your head, but some of it sank in," he said. "It was a way to lead our lives."

Chester Selbert, of the class of 1923, said that the nuns taught him how to take direction. Selbert recalls that such guidance was needed, because he and his companions constantly indulged in mischief.

Selbert remembered serving as an altar boy to Father Alexander McCabe, pastor of Holy Cross from 1913-46. The priest used to end the Mass by swaying to and fro in front of the altar as he blessed the congregation, a pattern Selbert and the altar boys imitated one Sunday while standing behind the priest, much to the amusement

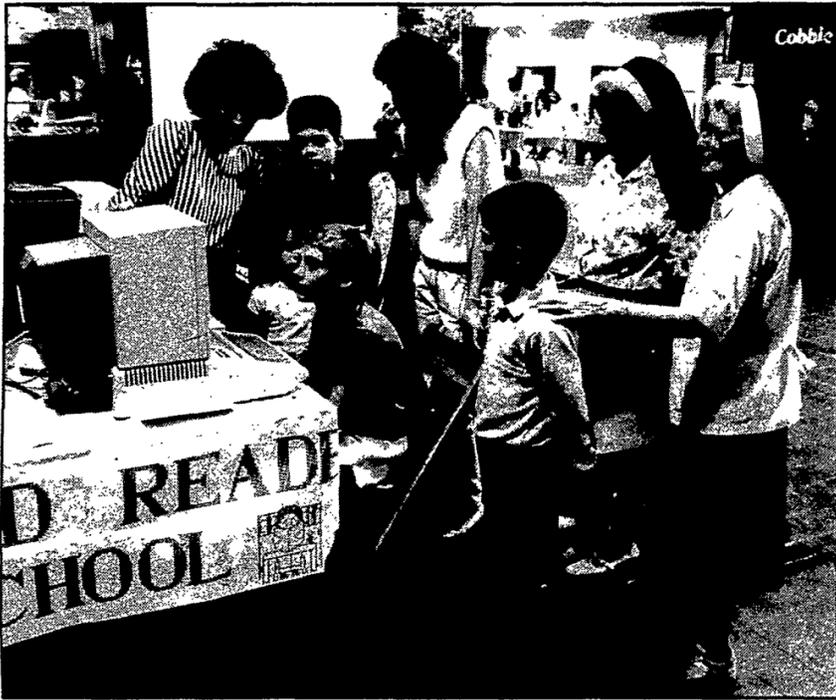
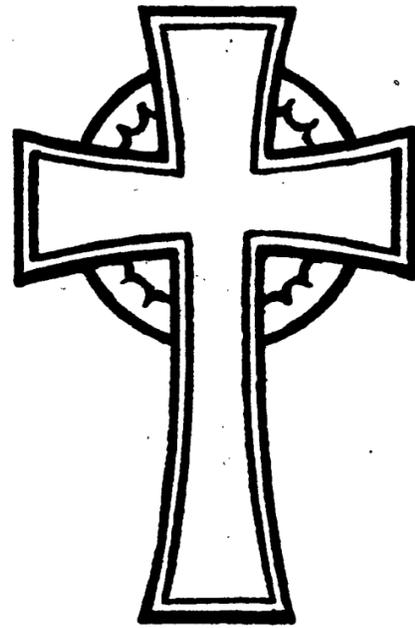
of those in the pews. Laughingly, Selbert recalled that Father McCabe had not found the altar boys' antics so amusing, and let the boys "have it" following the Mass.

But the tough discipline of Holy Cross' sisters and priests paid off in the end, Selbert said. "They certainly didn't start our life off in the wrong way," he said.

Virginia Agostinelli, a 1934 graduate, noted that her teachers combined discipline with a great sense of caring. "The nuns were always there after school to help you with extra help," she said, noting that her children and grandchildren also have attended the school.

Indeed, Sister Knipper remarked that families tend to stay with the parish, and many have sent three and even four generations through its corridors.

The Foy's have enrolled four children at Holy Cross, and two of their married children have sent their offspring to the school.



Three generations of the Holy Cross community look on as Matt Garcia works with the Accelerated Reader Program. From left to right are Maggie Everhart, parent co-coordinator; Rob Everhart; Patti Everhart; Casey Steve; teacher Sandy Garcia; and Sisters Mary Dominic and M. DePaul, RSM.



In this 1955 photo, Father J. Joseph O'Connell with Father John P. O'Malley (right) and Father William L. Reed (left) assist Mary Ann Tydings and Emilio Tortora of Holy Cross School in breaking ground for a school addition and a convent.

DeLucenay's parents graduated from Holy Cross, and her oldest son goes there. And Whelehan found a family of a different kind at Holy Cross — a family of lifelong friends.

"My grammar school friends for the most part are my friends. Forty years later, these are still my best friends," he said.

The school has helped Rob Everhart, who represents its current generation, find a friend in God. Everhart said that Holy Cross has taught him that "religion makes people happy." He said his teachers were friendly, and noted: "I was proud the school had been here a hundred years."

Sister Knipper shared the boy's pride, remarking that she hoped the school's future administrators will someday celebrate its 200th anniversary, something she said is likely because the school is located in northwestern Monroe County, which is growing in population. Holy Cross currently enjoys an enrollment of 430 students, she said.

In this era of school closings, Sister Knipper was confident that the school would survive. Her belief was reflected in the words of Rita Foy who praised the school's communal spirit.

"It's family life," she said. "I'd recommend it to anybody."

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