

# Research in kitchen yields summer volunteer effort

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The first time Daphne Gallo worked at St. Peter's Kitchen, one of the guests, a bit drunk, walked into the kitchen and asked her for hand in marriage.

Gallo, a parishioner at St. Christopher's in North Chili, declined the guest's request, and continued helping to prepare a meal for the 300 guests who come to the Brown Street kitchen six days a week for a free hot meal.

The marriage proposal might have convinced some novice volunteers to consider donating their time elsewhere, but Gallo decided to chalk it up to experience. Besides, she said, the presence of a muscular, 6'6" male volunteer in the dining area ensured her safety.

"It wasn't like I was alone," Gallo remarked, smiling.

A senior at E.J. Wilson High School in Spencerport, Gallo has since volunteered several Saturdays at St. Peter's Kitchen, where she has earned the praise of the kitchen's director, Nancy Paris-Christopher.

"(She's) a five-star volunteer," Christopher exclaimed, noting that the Rochester Metro League of Women Voters shared her sentiments. Last week, the league awarded third-place in its Citizenship Award Project to Gallo and classmates Shelly Baug, Kim Demchock, Stacy Walrath and Beverly Thompson for their research paper on local homelessness.

The students originally wrote the paper for their Participation in Government class at Wilson last fall. In addition to the third-place certificate, as well as a \$100 savings bond, from the League of Women Voters, the group was cited for its efforts by the Monroe County Legislature.

Rather than splitting the prize money, the girls donated it to St. Peter's Kitchen, where they did some of their research. The group noted that kitchens and overnight shelters are the most common approaches society takes to solving the problem of homelessness. Although these efforts help alleviate the problem, they offer only temporary relief to the homeless problem, the students wrote.

The group stated that the homeless can generally be characterized as either having "bad brains," "bad genes" or "bad luck." Those with "bad brains" are the mentally ill who have been released from institutions without knowing how to survive in the outside world.

Those with "bad genes" are usually men

addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, or who have committed crimes and/or possess personality disorders. Finally, those with "bad luck" are often the unemployed who have no marketable skills, or teenagers who are pregnant or who have dropped out of school. Many of these homeless people have no family support and live on the streets because they can't afford to rent apartments.

The students' paper blamed the Reagan administration for contributing to the problem by cutting support for low-income housing by more than 75 percent. The girls concluded that the government must reassert its role in combatting homelessness. The deinstitutionalized mentally ill should be monitored more closely, the students asserted, suggesting that vocational programs and other educational courses be established in the shelters themselves to help the unemployed.

The students also want the government to increase federal funding of programs that provide supplement vouchers to help poor families pay rent. The group also noted that fewer and fewer low-cost housing units are being built and suggested that the government fund new construction.

Gallo and her friends praised the local efforts of such organizations as the Volunteers of America, Dimitri House, St. Joseph's House of Hospitality and the Open Door Mission. Gallo plans to continue volunteering at St. Peter's Kitchen throughout the summer.

Christopher noted that it's volunteers like Gallo who keep the kitchen open in the lean months of summer. "In June, July and August, we need volunteers, and funds are low," Christopher said.

Gallo and her classmates noted this trend in their paper: "...(O)ur group went to a soup kitchen, before Christmas vacation... It is holiday time, a time for giving. Also, the cold weather has set in. People are more apt to give to the needy. Help, however, diminishes when the cold and holidays are over with. People in our society should not just help at a particular time of year because help is always needed."

Gallo plans to continue to practice what she preaches when she attends State University of New York at Fredonia next fall to study sound-recording technology. Someday, she hopes to record an album whose proceeds would go to fighting homelessness. "But I hope (the problem) is not around by then," she said.



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier  
Daphne Gallo, a senior at E.J. Wilson High School in Spencerport, helps prepare a meal for approximately 300 guests at St. Peter's Kitchen in Rochester. Gallo began volunteering at the kitchen when she and four other Wilson students undertook a research project on homelessness in the Rochester area. The students' efforts on this paper earned a third-place Citizenship Award Project from the Metro League of Women Voters.

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