

Group members find fun, faith as painters



Teamwork pays off for these three youth group members as they near completion of the Maple Street painting project on Friday, July 28. From front to back are Joe Eller, Chris Mechalke and Tom Webb.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Karen Stachowski and Dawn Randall believe adults need to take teenagers' abilities more seriously.

To prove their point, the students joined with about 30 others in the St. Cecelia/St. John the Baptist youth group to paint a local woman's single-story house and garage last week as part of a summer service project.

"A lot of times, people feel that teenagers can't do things like that," Stachowski said, "(that) they'll horse around too much and not get the job done. But we showed that we could get the job done."

Stachowski's comrades in youth group backed up her words by maturely dumping paint all over their youth group leader, Anne Karski, last Thursday, July 27, the final day of the project.

With the exception of that momentary lapse of reason — which was preceded by a few water fights — the youth group members earned high praise from the project's beneficiary, Patricia Forbes, who lives with her two children on Maple Avenue.

"They were a great group of teenagers," Forbes remarked. "They all seemed to be willing to help. They were



Christopher Millette

Toni West (left) gives Adam and Andi Cerio a helping hand cleaning brushes after most of the work was completed. Over the course of four days, about 30 teens from the St. Cecelia/St. John the Baptist youth group repainted a house owned by Pat Forbes, a single mother in Elmira.

polite and considerate. They had a real good time being with their friends, but they still worked."

The prospect of painting the house alone daunted Forbes, who has slowly made improvements on it since moving there two years ago from Illinois. Fitting in painting between substitute teaching in the Elmira public schools and tending to her children's needs, Forbes came up with a succinct estimate of the time she'd need to paint her peeling habitat: "Forever!"

Fortunately, her neighbor Toni West, a parishioner at St. Cecilia's, suggested that Forbes shorten her eternal timeline by enlisting the help of the St. Cecelia/St. John the Baptist youth group. West's daughter, Stephanie, a youth group member, had told her mother the youth group was looking for a summer service project. West brought the youth group and Forbes together, and the project was born.

Forbes kicked in part of the cost of the paint, and the youth group started scraping the house on Monday, July 24. Each member contributed from two hours to four days' worth of labor, enabling the group to complete the job swiftly.

Stachowski, who will be a junior next fall at Elmira Free Academy, said she enjoyed the project because it gave her the chance to do a good deed that meant more than simply helping someone out in the course of a day. "It was just like really nice to help somebody in the community and to know they really appreciated it," she said. "That house will be painted for a couple of years."

Mark Murray, a sophomore next fall at the Academy, said helping Forbes brought him to appreciate his own comfortable lifestyle. "It made us feel like what we got, we should respect. We should be happy with all the stuff we have," he commented, adding, "It teaches you to love your

neighbors and stuff."

Randall said the painting project convinced her that many teenagers do care about others, despite the fact that news articles may portray adolescents as self-absorbed drug-users and criminals. "I think the majority of teens would do good if given the opportunity. They're not being asked," she said.

Randall, a graduate of Edison High School, said this effort and a similar painting project at an Ohio work camp last summer also gave her new respect for adults. "The big thing that I learned ... was the fact that adults had trust in us as teens, because we were not professionals, but they let us work on their houses," she said.

Now that she herself is on the brink of adulthood, Randall, along with fellow youth group member Tom Webb, hopes to start a young adults' group at St. John the Baptist.

Karski, who accompanied Randall and seven other youth-group members to the Ohio work camp last summer, noted that St. Cecelia's/St. John's 45-member group will continue to look for service projects in addition to their periodic efforts at cleaning parishioners' yards and houses. "The kids are always looking for new challenges," she said.



High atop a ladder, Michelle Fairbrother takes a second to assess her work on the awning around the roof.



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