

# Alumnae treasure friendships

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Cardinal Mooney alumni depressed over the demise of their alma mater this June might well take a page from the book of St. Agnes High School's alumnae association.

In June, 1982, Brighton's St. Agnes High School suffered the same fate that befell Mooney and for the same reasons — declining enrollment and an overwhelming budget deficit.

Nonetheless, the St. Agnes Alumnae Association has attempted to keep alive the spirit of the school that spawned it. Hundreds of the high school's graduates have become interested in reviving the association, which became dormant following the school's closing, commented Judy Lang Atwood, the association's president.

Individual graduating classes continued to hold reunions throughout the mid-1980s, according to Sister Theresa Daniel, who taught business at the East River Road school from 1956-75. But it was her dream, and that of some of her former students, to pull together the various classes into one organization, using the nostalgia for the closed school as a jumping-off point to form a new community.

The task of creating the association was made easier by the efforts of many former class officers, Sister Daniel said. "So many of the girls who had been class presidents continued to feel a responsibility to keep in contact with as many people as possible," she said, noting that the association currently maintains a mailing list of 1,200 names.

Atwood noted that she had taken it upon herself to keep track of her classmates from the class of 1954. "As class president, I think my class looked for me to keep them together," she said. "I've always known where the other 20 girls have been."

When the association held a reunion for



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier  
Sister Ann Xavier Gantert (left), who taught at St. Agnes from 1960-68, and former principal Sister Mary Margaret Merkel, who served at the school from 1959-75, admire Kerry Marie, the daughter of Chris Scheverman Apeland (class of '74), during the St. Agnes Alumnae Association's May 20 reunion at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse.



Ellen Guyette Marshall (left) and Maureen Foster Nesmith, members of the class of '75, look through their class yearbook during the St. Agnes reunion, which was attended by about 350 of the school's alumnae and former faculty members.

all the school's classes in January, 1988, Atwood was overwhelmed by the turnout. "We only expected a couple of hundred, but almost 600 girls showed up," she said. "It was fantastic. We couldn't get rid of them," she added with a laugh. A similar reunion took place this past May, drawing about 350 people.

Now that she has the attention of the school's alumnae, Atwood hopes her organization will be able to channel graduates' energy into serving each other and the wider community. "We're hoping to put together a program for our girls who have lost spouses or children, or who are being abused," she noted.

The alumnae association is also considering getting members to volunteer their time to continuing-education programs for women, according to Kathy Whalen Phelan, vice president and a member of the class of '55. She pointed out, however, that the group has not decided just how it will go about establishing such a program.

The association will have plenty of human resources to tap for such endeavors, Atwood observed, because so many St. Agnes graduates went into professional fields. "One of our officers is a counselor in divorce and marriage. We have many teachers, (and) many girls who are officers in companies," she said.

St. Agnes was always distinguished by its emphasis on caring values, an emphasis that inspired many of its students to enter service-oriented careers, Sister Daniel said. "An extra large number of (graduates) went into the health profession," she recalled.

Lorraine Mooney Bestram, class of '74, credited St. Agnes with encouraging her to become a nurse. "When I was in high school, I volunteered at Strong Memorial Hospital, and I was in the volunteer club. I guess that played a part," she remembered.

But just as important as the alumnae's desire to serve others is the simple joy of being with one another. Nancy Bayer Jen-

nings, a 1966 graduate, said she enjoys the annual reunions because they reinforce the sense of caring and direction the school gave her. "Now that I'm older, I can say that I liked the structure, I liked the discipline. It was kind of like a family unit," she asserted.

Each reunion reveals new aspects of classmates, Atwood said. "It's wonderful to go back and see the class mouse has become the butterfly," she said. "We see how we've grown."

Not all the growth has been of a spiritual nature, she noted, jokingly. "Our skinniest girls are the ones who now need Omar the tent-maker!" she said.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** St. Agnes' alumnae will meet again Jan. 21, 1990, at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, 4095 East Ave., to celebrate the feast of St. Agnes.

## Theater sets auditions

Youtheatre of Nazareth College, Rochester, will be holding auditions for paid acting roles for the 1989-90 season, Sept. 6-8, from 3-8 p.m. at the college's arts center.

Roles are available for males and females ages 6 and older. For the audition, each actor must prepare a two-minute memorized monologue from a play.

To schedule an audition, call Nancy Peet at the Nazareth College Arts Center at 716/586-2483, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

## Registration continues

Nazareth Academy is still accepting registrations for the 1989-90 school year.

To make a day or evening appointment to tour the school, meet with administration and learn about curricular and extra-curricular activities, call 716/458-8583, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.