

'Aunt Mary' reaches out to children

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Although Mary Hannick never married and had children of her own, she is "Aunt Mary" or "Grandma Hannick" to hundreds of children.

Friends and colleagues recently honored the St. Anne's parishioner for "the heartfelt caring and strength she gives to children with disabilities" by making a room-naming grant — totaling more than \$35,000 — in her name at the Mary Cariola Children's Center.

The center's new wing was built in 1987, and last year the agency's board of directors moved to dedicate one of its rooms in Hannick's name. Since the Oct. 16 dedication, the room is being used as a classroom for 11 multiply handicapped young adults between the ages of 14 and 21.

Mary Cariola, who died in 1987, founded the center in 1949 after becoming outraged that no facilities existed in Rochester to serve her developmentally disabled nephew. The agency — originally known as the Daycare Training Center for Handicapped Children — is part of the Al Sigi Center, which houses seven other autonomous rehabilitative facilities.

As she walked through the halls on a recent visit, the 80-year-old Hannick stopped to talk to the children, most of whom she knows by name. "Chin up," she said to one. "Get better now, honey," to another.

Chosen as one of Mary Cariola's original board members, Hannick has been an important part of the center for 35 years. Although she cannot work with the center's young clients because of her role on the board, she expresses great concern for the center's children. A board member is encouraged not to get personally involved with the children so policy decisions won't be clouded by emotion.

Elisa Root, Mary Cariola's community liaison coordinator, said that a board member at the center has to have a clearly defined role.

She said, however, that since Hannick is



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Mary Hannick reaches out to Teresa Boner, 15, one of the 11 multiply handicapped young adults who use the Mary Cariola Children's Center classroom dedicated in Hannick's name.

comfortable with the children, she is an extra special asset to the center.

Hannick, whom Root called "ageless," retired in 1971 from the Genesee Settlement House where she served as director for 25 years. Since then, the former social worker said she has been busier than ever.

In addition to her devotion to the Mary Cariola Center, Hannick has been involved with many other social welfare organizations over the years. During World War II, she served overseas for 18 months as a hospital social worker for the American Red Cross.

Before becoming director of the Genesee Settlement House, she served as director of the Charles Settlement House for eight years. Past memberships include the board of directors of DePaul Mental Health Services, the long-range planning committee for the Health Association of Rochester, the executive committee of the Women's Council for the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, and the board of directors of the YWCA.

In 1968, she was named social worker of the year by the National Association of Social Workers, and she was presented the key to the city of Rochester in 1971 and 1974. In 1986, she received the YWCA award for community service.

For 10 years now, Hannick has been a board member of the Catholic Family Center and a member of the advisory board of the Social Work Committee at Nazareth College. She also still serves on the board of the United Way of Monroe County and is vice president of the board of the Volunteers of America of Western New York.

Hannick refuses to take all the credit for her numerous accomplishments, insisting that the many people who have touched her life have brought about her success.

One of the special people in her life today is Mariana Santiago, a 10-year-old girl Hannick has known since the child's birth. While visiting a friend who was in Panama with the Peace Corps over 15 years ago, the social worker met Mariana's mother, Isaura, and arranged to bring her to the United States. Since then the two women have been close friends.

"I was like (Isaura's) surrogate mother," said Hannick.

Practically since she learned to talk, Mariana has referred to Hannick as "Tia," which is Spanish for aunt. Now a fifth-grade student at Nazareth Hall, Mariana said she loves spending time with her "aunt" because Hannick helps her with her homework and helps her with such skills as being confident. The pair spends almost every weekend together, and Han-

nick said the energetic girl keeps her young.

"She keeps me up-to-date on what's going on with the New Kids on the Block," Hannick joked.

Another person who has known Hannick for many years is Don Burke, executive director at the Mary Cariola Center for the past 20 years. Burke said the center's new room could not have been named for a better person. Every board of directors should have a Mary Hannick, he said.

"Mary keeps the board focused on people. We have a variety of issues we have to deal with, including the budget, but Mary brings us back to the real reason why we are here — the kids," said the veteran director.

Dan Myers, president of the Al Sigi Center, noted that children with special needs have been Hannick's special love.

"Not a day goes by that 'Aunt Mary,' as she's known to hundreds of families who have adopted her, is not talking about, writing to, or doing for a child or family," the president observed during the classroom dedication ceremony.

Hannick plans to keep bringing her special touch to the community, and has no intention of slowing down. Even though she said her work is satisfying enough, Hannick added that it is nice to be recognized for her accomplishments.

"It's wonderful that these things (the dedication) happen before you die," she said. "The community hasn't forgotten about me, and I feel very fortunate about that."

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We would prefer to endorse a third candidate, but it is difficult to distinguish between the four remaining aspirants.

We do not hesitate, however, to recommend Elizabeth W. Pine and Stephen D. Aronson. They clearly impress us as the two best choices to sit on the state Supreme Court."

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