

Consultant stresses need to sell schools

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Richard Della Costa makes no bones about it. "What we're doing now is selling a product," the diocesan school-marketing consultant said. "I think if we look at it as a sales product, we can be a success."

"It" is Catholic education, and after the events of the past two years, it seems clear that Catholic schools in the Monroe County area could use some salesmanship.

Due to declining enrollments and rising costs, several diocesan elementary schools and one Catholic high school have closed since 1988. The diocese hired Della Costa last summer to help reverse that trend.

Della Costa's salary and a \$20,000 marketing and recruiting budget are part of the diocesan Catholic schools office's \$116,444 budget for planning and marketing. Thanks Giving Appeal monies account for \$54,194 of the office's planning and marketing budget.

Della Costa is overseeing marketing and recruiting efforts for Monroe County Catholic schools, and is coordinating a financial-aid program designed to attract and keep students in the system. The marketing consultant's duties include working with the communications committees of the four quadrant governing boards and with the in-

Catholic Thanks Giving Appeal

1990

DIocese of ROCHESTER

dividual schools in each quadrant.

Della Costa is currently concentrating part of his efforts on the 11 Catholic schools in the city. "The fact is that our major (enrollment) problem is in the inner-city schools," he said. "These are the schools with the fewest resources and the greatest need to be creative with their (recruiting) efforts."

Della Costa said he wants individual Catholic city schools to become more visible in the community. He noted that the 11 Catholic schools in the city were featured this fall in posters and brochures expounding the attractive qualities of each individual school.

Three hundred green posters with pockets were produced to be hung in such locations as storefronts, libraries and offices throughout the city during the first week of October. The pockets on each poster were filled with eight pages featuring photographs and the biography of each



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Richard Della Costa stands in front of a map of diocesan schools in his Pastoral Center office.

school. In all, 2,500 brochures were distributed by means of the pocket posters, Della Costa said.

Browsers could pick up a brochure, for example, and learn that Most Precious Blood's students "have the opportunity to work with 15 computers, learn Spanish, and choose from vocal and instrumental music classes." Parents interested in sending their children to St. Andrew's School could learn that the school provides all-day child care, an on-site human-services coordinator, and a hot lunch program.

Della Costa said that school officials are tracking the number of people who inquire

about their school because of the publicity campaign. "Everyone who calls in as a result of having seen the brochure or the poster will be invited in for a tour of the school," he said.

Indeed, visits that use face-to-face contact with school officials are a major part of the diocesan school-marketing strategy, Della Costa said. "We encourage a lot of school visits," he said, adding that "a lot of the schools are doing local marketing things," such as setting up volunteer phone banks to call prospective school parents.

Such efforts marked the resurgence of St. Boniface School over the last several months, said Della Costa, who cited the Whalen Street school as a prime example of the marketing and recruiting efforts he hopes to see other Catholic schools imitate.

St. Boniface, which is located in the Southeast Quadrant, was targeted for closing last January by the Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools when the commission released its initial reorganization plan. After a storm of protest compelled the commission to table its first proposal, St. Boniface Parish inaugurated an intense recruiting effort designed to show the commission that the parish school was a viable institution.

The parish erected a two-way sign on the school's front lawn that stated: "Yes, We're Open." Organizers placed ads in

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Hospital cuts positions to offset deficit

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

HORNELL — In an effort to put its 1991 budget in the black, St. James Mercy Hospital eliminated the equivalent of 40 full-time positions. The layoffs, which were first announced the week of Oct. 28, will eventually affect 45 people.

According to Janis Conklin, director of community relations at St. James Mercy, some of the layoffs included part-time employees whose hours, when combined, equal one full-time position at the hospital.

Conklin said cuts were made across the board, and that the move will trim the number of hospital employees from 650 to 605.

Conklin noted that recently hired employees were the first to be let go. When positions slated for elimination were occupied by employees with seniority at the hospital, the senior employees were given the option of moving into positions vacated by the newer hires. "The last to come were the first to go," she said.

Conklin pointed out that the layoffs are part of the hospital's wider effort to trim costs in its 1991 business plan. The plan also calls for a lean budget for hospital supplies and equipment.

Conklin said the layoffs should save the hospital more than \$500,000 in the 1991

fiscal year. St. James is currently operating in the red, but should have a balanced budget next year, she said.

A combination of factors led to the decision to make the cutbacks, Conklin remarked. St. James has opened several new outpatient services in the last two years, she said, noting that outpatient offices usually need staff on hand for only one shift daily, whereas inpatient services are generally staffed on a 24-hour-a-day basis. Hence, the outpatient offices need less staff in order to operate, she observed.

Conklin also noted that rising health costs and the fact that more than half the hospital's patients are on Medicare and Medicaid have caused the hospital to be undercompensated for patient care.

In particular, she observed, the hospital recently completed \$23 million worth of construction in order to update its critical-care and diagnostic-services facilities. In light of the construction, the hospital had applied to New York state for a change in its reimbursement rates, in accord with the state's policy of granting such rate changes to hospitals with "substantially-changed-facility" status.

But the hospital was not granted the status change, even though St. James had increased its square footage by 50 percent and bought all new equipment for the

reconstructed units, Conklin said. As a result, the hospital will have to absorb more of the construction costs than it had anticipated, she said.

Conklin noted that when St. James began the construction project, some Hornell-area people had complained that the hospital was unnecessarily adding to its facilities. Yet the hospital had made no major improvements in 20 years, she said, adding, "These things were necessary."

When asked whether the hospital will eventually rehire the released employees, Conklin said: "I think that will depend entirely on what happens with patient demand for services."

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