

Youths spread warmth in storm's aftermath

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

Although the March 3 ice storm left thousands of people cold and discouraged throughout the Rochester area and Finger Lakes region, some young people across the diocese found ways to restore the spirits of power-less neighbors and friends.

The youths also learned important lessons about togetherness and support along the way.

Take for instance Peter Pirro, a member of the youth group at St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield, who said he was up all night when the storm hit.

"The first thing on my mind was an entire 'Wow!'" said Pirro, recalling his initial reaction to the destruction of the storm.

The 16-year-old Pirro said he was first concerned with the safety of his 1-year-old sister, Julie. One of five children ranging in age from 1- to 17-years-old, Pirro said his tasks in the first few hours of darkness included keeping the smaller children calm and finding flashlights.

Later in the day, Pirro and some friends observed the storm's damage as they walked the streets in their heavily wooded neighborhood. Knowing that a few neighbors were away for the weekend and would face a horrible mess upon their return, Pirro decided to give them a head start on clean-up efforts by piling up branches.

Pirro's next job was helping his neighbors transport the family's generator door-to-door for those who needed heat and electricity.

The Macedon youth also invited over a friend whose bedroom — which happened to be located in the basement of his house — was flooded.

Despite the hardships brought on by the storm, Pirro showed an unflinching determination to weather its effects.

"Actually it's kind of neat," Pirro said with a sheepish grin. "It's good to be back together with the family, cooking ravioli on the grill."

Barry Wilson, another St. Joseph's youth group member, said he was busy helping his family bail water and chop wood several days after the storm. The youth said he wasn't disturbed by the hard work created by the storm, but he was saddened by the tremendous loss of trees in the Rochester area.

"It's so sad that everything is ruined. The houses used to look so nice with all the trees in front," the Penfield High School senior noted.

Tara Luchetti, a sophomore at Penfield High, noted that the lack of power and heat



Approximately 20 members of the St. Joseph's Parish youth group in Penfield took advantage of power restoration at the home of Peter Pirro on March 7 by spending a warm night in the family's living room.

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

After the devastating ice storm hit, the first concern of youth group member Peter Pirro was the safety of his year-old sister Julie. Pirro said his tasks in the first few hours of darkness included keeping the younger children in his family calm and finding flashlights. Later in the day, he and his friends helped clean up neighbors' lawns.



had its advantages.

"I had time to get closer to my dad, and spend more time with him," explained Luchetti, whose power was restored on March 6.

Meghan Riccione, a 15-year-old member of Our Lady of Lourdes youth group in Brighton, said she wanted to help others because she felt guilty over having electricity, heat and cable all week.

Riccione was one of four youths from Our Lady of Lourdes who ventured up to Lake Ontario to help clean up Carol Tometsko's summer home.

Tometsko, who volunteers her time with the group, opens her home to seniors annually for a spring retreat. Youth Ministry Coordinator Johan Engstrom rounded up group members for the project on March 5.

"I felt like it was needed and I was helping," remarked Riccione, a sophomore at Brighton High School. "I really learned that if something terrible happens, we can all pitch in and help each other."

Fellow group member, Sarah Bertucci, said she was glad to help Tometsko because "she does so much" for the group.

In addition to piling up sticks and raking, Bertucci said the foursome also helped Tometsko's neighbor clean up his lawn. The Our Lady of Mercy sophomore said she observed many people helping each other during the week.

Bertucci said she was amazed when neighbors — who had seen Bertucci and her grandparents using a handsaw to cut tree limbs — offered their chain saw without even being asked. "They saw we were getting no where and wanted to help out," the 15-year-old youth group member said.

She added, "Obviously it was a disaster, but it brought out the good in people."

Tometsko couldn't give enough praise to the youths for clearing the debris of six large poplars that went down on her property.

"They cleaned every last bit of it and then after that did the neighbor's, whom they didn't know from a hole in the ground," exclaimed a grateful Tometsko.

The Brighton resident pointed out that the youths could have stayed inside all day, but they chose to help out people instead.

"If anyone ever says anything bad about teenagers in front of me, they are going to have a fight," Tometsko warned.

Wanda Morante also commended the youths in her group for the way they pitched in after the storm.

Morante, youth coordinator for Holy Trinity Parish in Webster, said she began thinking about her neighbor — who has a heart condition — after the storm. She called on a few boys in the youth group to come out and help.

"It was exciting for them because they had been on retreat last weekend and were

flying high to help someone," noted Morante.

The boys got their chance to put what they learned on retreat into action as they bailed out the neighbor's basement.

"The man was old and sick and his downstairs was a mess," recalled Jim LaMonica, a 15-year-old Webster resident.

After the work was done, LaMonica said he felt good about helping the elderly man.

"You could just tell he was thankful. He didn't have to say anything special," LaMonica said.

He added that he learned a valuable lesson during the state of emergency. "We have to help the people who can't help themselves," he offered.

LaMonica's friend, Mike Abate, didn't arrive at the neighbor's house until after the work had been completed so he helped the Morante's install a water pump. Despite the dire circumstances, Abate said it was "neat that people are opening up to other people in this time of need."

The 16-year-old McQuaid Jesuit student said he was impressed when he heard a woman on a local radio station offer a fold-away bed to anyone who needed it.

"It's kind of neat to see the whole community come together ... Even though they don't know each other, they are willing to help out," Abate said.

But perhaps Pirro summed it up best when he said: "Necessity is not the mother of invention, but the mother of togetherness."

Exchange program seeks host families for youth

The International Education Forum, a non-profit high school exchange organization, is seeking families in the Rochester and Monroe County areas to host foreign high school students for the 1991-92 school year.

The students hail from Europe and Asia, and will arrive in mid-August for a 10-month school year. All students have been thoroughly screened and tested during the application process, and all have good academic skills as well as sufficient English proficiency to function in English-speaking family, community and school settings.

Host families are asked to provide room, board and an enthusiasm to share their American lifestyles.

For more information call Beth Ann Crowley at 716/442-0109, Kathy Onorati at 716/227-3320, or IEF's toll-free number, 1-800-228-4485.

In addition, a one-month summer program to France, Germany or Spain, and a six-month or one-year school exchange to Australia or France are available for U.S. high school students ages 13-18. Call the 800-number for information.

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