

House serves as final home for the dying

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Tony Burrows, a volunteer at Elisha House, 370 Chili Ave., remembered the late Geraldine Lay as a woman whose bright personality could penetrate the clouds of gloom that surrounded his heart when he was down.

"You could be depressed when you got here, and she could make your whole day," Burrows said as he sat talking with Lay's relatives. The group was seated in the kitchen of Elisha House — an alternative home-care facility for the terminally ill — on the day after Lay's funeral. The 74-year-old Mrs. Lay resided at Elisha House from Feb. 27 until the afternoon of March 9, when she succumbed to a yearlong battle against stomach cancer.

In some way or other, Burrows added, the Greece resident made a point of expressing her gratitude to him and to the other volunteers at the house for attending to her needs. "Maybe not a thank you, but always a big smile on her face that let you know you were appreciated," he continued.

Burrows' efforts are part of a cooperative venture undertaken by the owner of Elisha's House, St. Augustine's Catholic Church, and the neighboring St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. The two congregations opened Elisha House Feb. 1, after two years of planning, according to Episcopal Deacon Lynne McNulty, house director.

McNulty — whose husband, Brian, is a deacon at St. Augustine's — said she recognized the need for a place like Elisha House after doing a chaplain residency at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester. The plight of the hospital's AIDS patients, in particular, moved her to think about what it was like to suffer a disease that often makes its victims outcasts from society and even their own families.

"Most of the patients I had were gay people," McNulty said, noting that these patients' families "heaped a lot of guilt on them." She added that some families chose to consider AIDS as a "punishment" for the lifestyles of their relatives. Such family attitudes left many of these AIDS patients with few alternatives on how to spend their last days. "There was no way they were going to home to die," she remarked.

McNulty knew her husband's parish owned a Chili Avenue home that had formerly housed a parish outreach center, so she proposed to the two parishes' leadership that they jointly open a home for the terminally ill. She noted that St. Stephen's and St. Augustine's have signed



Sharon Sedore (left) and her daughter, Jill Planeta, share a moment in the Elisha House bedroom in which Sedore's mother, Geraldine Lay, spent the days leading up to her March 9 death.

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

a "Statement of Agreement," which calls the two churches to work cooperatively in outreach efforts.

In that cooperative spirit, 37 people — including members of both parishes and neighbors — have volunteered to work in Elisha House as care givers, cooks, cleaners, errand runners, clerics and maintenance staff. Currently, the facility can house one person 24-hours-a-day, but McNulty hopes to increase her volunteer staff to 130 so that the house can accommodate two guests on a regular basis.

But getting people to volunteer these days can be difficult work, remarked Dick St. Pierre, a volunteer at the house and a parishioner at St. Augustine's.

"Volunteerism ... is hard right now," St. Pierre said. "The economy is so bad that people who used to volunteer don't." Ministry to the dying is emotionally taxing work, St. Pierre said, adding, "This is certainly not an area a lot of people feel comfortable with."

In addition to relying on volunteer help, the facility's \$50,000 annual budget depends on memorial donations and other gifts, McNulty said, adding that the facility



Geraldine Lay sported the Christmas spirit in this family photograph from the 1986-87 holiday season.

charges no fee to its guests. She cited grants from the Catholic diocese's Division of Urban Ministries, Eastman Kodak Co., the Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation, and other sources as crucial to the home's operation. McNulty said she is still trying to raise half the funds for the 1991 budget.

In addition to monetary help, Elisha House has received donations of furniture and other items from Sunset House in Rochester, and from Isaiah House, a similar alternative care home operated by the Corpus Christi Parish.

So far, Elisha House has been the final home for Mrs. Lay and two other elderly cancer patients, McNulty said. Relatives of the most recent guest — Mrs. Lay's younger sister, Jean Haus; daughter, Sharon Sedore; and granddaughter, Jill Planeta — observed that Mrs. Lay had loved spending her final days at Elisha House.

"She was very happy here," Burrows said of Lay. "I think once she got the sense of where she was and her surroundings ... it was just a mellow road on down."

Lay took to that road at the urging of her daughter, Sedore, who wanted her to

Continued on page 24

The Merton H. Kays Funeral Home

Richard H. Dye, Lic. Owner
59 Monroe St., Honeoye Falls
(off street parking) 624-1120

Serving Mendon,
Rush and
Henrietta



Michael R. Yackiw Funeral Home

1270 Norton St.
544-5000



HEDGES MEMORIAL CHAPEL, Inc.
770 E. Main St. • Rochester, NY 14605
454-7070

*Serving the Needs of
Catholic Families throughout the
Rochester Diocese for over 125 years*

- Pre-need counseling available without obligation
- Services provided regardless of economic circumstances

James A. Aiello

Christopher M. Lawrence

Law Offices RON BUTTARAZZI

"Counsel & Support when you need it most."

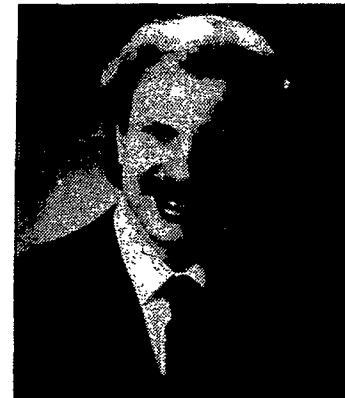
INHERITANCE & WILLS

Do You Have A Will?

After The Death Of A Loved One, Probate Problems Can Add To Your Troubles. A Trusted Family Attorney Can Help You Cope With Probate Administration In A Prompt And Professional Manner So That Your Family Concerns Can Take Precedence Over Legal Entanglements. Let Us Help Ensure Your Family's Future Security & Peace Of Mind.

Give Us A Call Today.

Full and comprehensive legal services for all personal, family and business concerns.



232-4640

Wisdom, Justice, Judgement, Equity...Prov 1:1