

Williamson resident finds 'home' with the Knights

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

WEBSTER — When he first moved to the Rochester area in 1964, Long Island native Ray Pfeifer was at a low point in his life.

Married with three small daughters, Pfeifer had been unemployed for six months following a layoff from his job on Long Island.

He had finally found a job with Xerox Corp. in Rochester, but accepting it meant leaving family and friends behind.

In 1966, however, an acquaintance invited Pfeifer to join the Knights of Columbus Trinity Council #4618 in Webster. He did.

"That was the best move of my life," Pfeifer declared.

That "move" led to increasing involvement with the Knights for Pfeifer, who served as the council's Grand Knight from 1970-72.

Then followed a myriad of diocesan and state positions with the Knights, culminating this July 1, when Pfeifer became State Deputy. Now a Williamson resident, he is the first man from the Rochester diocese to hold the order's highest New York state post.

But the Knights have meant more to Pfeifer and his family than just positions of authority, he observed.

"This is our home," Pfeifer said. "This is our family. I have a very strong romance with the Knights of Columbus."

Pfeifer actually had belonged to the Knights before his move upstate. But the Webster council came along at a point in his life when he most needed support, he recalled.

"When I came down to that first meeting," Pfeifer said, "the camaraderie just poured out of those guys. They kept on encouraging and nurturing me."

The Knights — and his increasing involvement with council and state Knights' offices — also helped Pfeifer discover and develop his ability to work with people. In fact, he credits his experiences as a Knight with helping him find his niche at Xerox, where he currently works as a personnel specialist.

Pfeifer pointed out that the K of C is "not a beer and pretzel group. We are a community service organization."

Thus he and the Knights have been involved over the years in such projects as prison ministry, supporting a cardiac unit in Webster, coordinating Masses at the Hill Haven Nursing Home, fighting drug abuse and hosting an annual Christmas party for

sidents of a home for the developmentally disabled.

Further, Pfeifer said he has developed his sense of faith and ministry through his participation in the Catholic men's organization.

Faith became especially important to Pfeifer on Sept. 6, 1990, when his granddaughter, Christine Theresa King, was born prematurely and weighing just 20 ounces. Doctors predicted that she would not live — and the prognosis grew darker when she needed open-heart surgery shortly after birth.

"I went to Mass every day," Pfeifer recalled. "It was prayers that pulled her through."

Christine now weighs 14 pounds, and is alert and bright, he said.

Pfeifer speaks of her with pride — as he does of his three other granddaughters, his three daughters and, especially, his wife, Sara.

Although the Knights is a men's organization, Pfeifer said it encourages the involvement of spouses and children through women's groups, social activities, and such family events as Easter egg hunts and breakfasts with Santa Claus.

"It brought my family much, much closer together," he said.

Pfeifer, meanwhile, has to look to his duties as state deputy. Although the Knights of Columbus are enjoying record membership levels in the United States — numbering more than 1.5 million — New York state has witnessed a decline from 127,000 in 1970 to 115,000 in 1991.

During his two-year term as deputy, Pfeifer said he will seek ways of attracting new members. One method he is pushing is a leadership-training program to help current Knights become more effective leaders — and recruiters.

Pfeifer also must help prepare for the Aug. 3-6, 1992, meeting of the Supreme Council — the organization's national governing board — in New York City.

Next year also marks the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus in the New World. In addition to using the quincentennial as a way to recruit new members, the Knights have planned a parade in New York City at the time of their gathering there, and an essay contest for school children.

Pfeifer said he has just one hope for the day in June, 1993, when he steps down as state deputy.

"I just want to be known for what I've done for the good of the order," he said.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Ray Pfeifer is the first local man to become state deputy of the Knights.



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