



Mercy High School senior Lisa Sobieraj (right) works on a sewing project with Mildred Cannon at the Volunteers of America Adult Home in Rochester Jan. 14. Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Sewing together close friendships

Mercy students provide help at adult residence

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The outpouring of warmth up on the 11th floor of the Volunteers of America Adult Home was a stark contrast to the bitter cold that gripped the rest of downtown Rochester on a recent January evening.

Female residents inside the facility, located at 95 W. Main St., basked in a glow of anticipation as they sewed away while dreaming of walking down the aisle at their big summer fashion show.

The greatest warmth, however, was generated from the presence of a dedicated bunch of volunteers who visit these women every Thursday evening.

This sewing group has performed continuous service for the last 32 years. It originally served Rochester Psychiatric Center residents before moving about 13 years ago to the Volunteers of America.

Most of the contingent's members represent Our Lady of Mercy High School, 1437 Blossom Road — either as Sisters of Mercy, teachers, parents or students.

And, in many respects, it's the student representation which proves to be the key link in promoting happiness among those who live at the Volunteers of America facility.

"(The students) give (the residents) a feeling of freshness. There's something about young people that's joyous," said Sister Mary Dismas Foster, RSM, the group's founder, who remains an active participant.

"The kids have an awful lot of spirit. And, being an adult home, there are not enough kids consistently around," observed Sister Joan McAteer, RSM, the group's student coordinator. Sister McAteer is also head of Mercy High's theology department.

This year, three Mercy students have been joining the adult volunteers on a



Sandra Miceli, a graduate of Mercy High School, holds a mirror for Marcia Shelley, who was modeling a wedding dress she made.

regular basis: Lisa Sobieraj and Rene Poslusny, both seniors; and junior Mandy Block.

During the Thursday-evening sessions, volunteers combine their efforts to help each participating resident prepare three outfits. In a few more months, the women living at the VOA adult home will don their newly made clothing and — adorned with jewelry, makeup and new hairstyles — stage an elaborate fashion show in the home's 11th-floor recreation room.

"They look so beautiful and are so happy," recalled Sandra Miceli, a 1992 Mercy graduate, who assisted with last year's fashion show.

When scheduling volunteers, Sisters Foster and McAteer put a high priority on maximizing one-on-one attention for the resident group, which generally numbers between 10 and 15 women of varying ages.

"This shows that someone cares about them individually; that someone is there for them," said Miceli, 19, currently a freshman at the State Universi-



Junior Mandy Block (right) uses sign language to speak with Marcia Shelley, who is deaf.

ty of New York at Buffalo. Miceli returned to help out the sewing group during UB's semester break.

"It's not just sewing. We talk a lot, and we're friends," added the 17-year-old Block.

Miceli noted that upon her first visit last year, the residents' various disabilities weren't nearly as apparent as she had anticipated.

"I didn't see why they were here. They weren't any different than people walking around Irondequoit Mall," commented Miceli.

Most of the VOA adult residence's 375 inhabitants suffer from mental, emotional and/or physical disabilities. In addition, nearly two-thirds of the residents have been homeless at some point in their lives.

Brian Sheetz, public relations director for the adult home, noted that programs such as the sewing club are vital in painting accurate portrayals of the people VOA helps.

"You get beyond the stereotypes. The big misconception is that these people are like the dirty old bag ladies you see on the network news all the time," remarked Sheetz.

In addition to the sewing club, Sister McAteer pointed out that Mercy High has also maintained ties with Rochester Psychiatric Center. This past December, nearly 150 Mercy students threw a party and distributed more than 2,000 gifts they had collected for residents at the center, located at 1600 South Ave.

Montessori school plans 25th-anniversary event

PITTSFORD — Trinity Montessori School, 4095 East Ave., will celebrate its 25th anniversary with an assembly on Tuesday, Jan. 26, at 7:30 p.m. The event will be held in the lower auditorium of the Nazareth College Arts Center, 4245 East Ave.

Guest speaker will be Sister Anthonita Porta, currently the administrator and head teacher at the Montessori Children's House in Adrian, Mich. She will speak on the philosophy of Montessori education.

The event is free and open to the public. Further details can be obtained from Sister Clare Francis Mogenhan, SSJ, school administrator, at 716/586-1044.

Trinity Montessori School is operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph. It offers an educational program for children ages 18 months through seven years.

Diocese sets retreats in Painted Post, Livonia

Two retreats are scheduled during the next two months for high school students within the Rochester diocese.

"Awakening Faith" is a weekend experience geared toward freshmen and sophomores. Two sessions will be offered: Feb. 5-7 at Watson Homestead in Painted Post, and March 5-7 at Camp Stella Maris in Livonia. Cost is \$60 per person.

"Encountering Christ" designed for high school juniors and seniors, will be conducted Feb. 15-17 at the Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua. Cost is \$65.

Interested youths may register through their parish or by contacting Michael Theisen, diocesan youth ministry coordinator, at 716/328-3210. Those calling outside Monroe County can reach Theisen at 1-800-388-7177.

Hymn singers needed for Feb. 2 celebration

ROCHESTER — Young singers from the Rochester diocese are invited to participate in a hymn festival on Tuesday, Feb. 2, at Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park.

This event is being held in conjunction with the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Youths ages 8-14 should arrive for rehearsal at the cathedral at 6:45 p.m. The festival begins at 7:30 p.m.

Interested parish youths or music coordinators are asked to call Jura Litchfield at 716/328-3210, ext. 345.

Arts school seeks youths to dance in teen troupe

VICTOR — The Arts School of Classical Dance is currently seeking youths, ages 12-17, who are interested in participating with the school's teen dance troupe.

This group performs throughout the year at such settings as nursing homes and schools.

For information, call Lorene Benson at 716/924-2629.