

Teenage laborers provide welcome invasion

Work camp helps 70 homeowners

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

SENECA FALLS — Names of western and central New York towns frequently turned up in scripts by the late *Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling, a former Tompkins County resident.

So it's safe to assume that Serling would have had a great time with recent activities in Seneca Falls.

Hundreds of teenagers descend upon the quiet village, assaulting the homes of residents. No one knows these youths or where they came from. And what, exactly, is their intent? MUSIC: Doo-doo-doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo...

Actually, work performed the week of July 18-24 was anything but scary. In fact, approximately 70 houses received some badly needed repair, courtesy of Group Work Camps.

The non-profit, interdenominational organization employs teenagers who travel during the summer months to various locations — usually small-town settings — around the country. A total of 425 journeyed to Seneca Falls last month to repair residences in that village as well as surrounding towns.

This was the first appearance in the Rochester diocese by Group Work Camps, which was founded in Loveland, Colo., 16 years ago. Group Work Camps is conducting 20 similar operations nationwide this summer.

The week-long project was initiated by Father David Gramkee, pastor at St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls. The camp was originally supposed to be held in Livingston County, but when those plans fell through in late 1992, Father Gramkee began making arrangements for Group Work Camps to come to Seneca Falls instead.

Teenage workers and their adult supervisors resided in classrooms at Mynderse Academy high school for the week, leaving at 8:30 a.m. each day to work at an assigned location. Houses were designated by "poverty level or physical need," said Group Work Camps' Jim Knowles, who served as director of the Seneca Falls project. "Many of the homeowners are elderly people and single parents," said Knowles.



Group Work Camp volunteer Ryan Adelman from Lancaster, Pa., concentrates on fastening drywall to an upstairs room in a Seneca Falls home.

Working in crews of six (five teens and one adult), the crews performed an array of projects such as painting, roofing, porch repair, drywall and construction of wheelchair ramps.

Prayer also constitutes a large portion of Group Work Camps. Crews took prayer breaks during the work day, and then prayed in large-group settings during the evening back at Mynderse.

Amazingly, not only does Group Work Camps perform its services for free, but campers actually pay a \$299 fee, along with travel expenses, to participate.

Melissa Cisiewicz, 18, a parishioner at St. Louis Church in Alexandria, Va., has enjoyed the work camps so much that she's now participated in four of them.

"It's a wonderful experience, absolutely wonderful," said Cisiewicz.

The Seneca Falls project marked the first work camp for fellow St. Louis parishioner James Van Deusen. Like Cisiewicz, he derived a great deal of satisfaction from helping others.



Laveena Sollenberger reads from the Youth Bible during a break

"The smiles you see on peoples' faces — that's what makes you come, right there," commented Van Deusen, 16.

"The main reason for doing this is to help kids' faith grow, not to do the job," Knowles explained. "And, by the end of the week, they will have made new friends. They also find that their self-esteem rises, because they've done something they didn't think they could do."

Father Gramkee noted that no local teens participated because the camp already had a sufficient number of workers registered when the decision was made to hold it in Seneca Falls.

"It was not an intent to exclude," Father Gramkee said.

The St. Patrick's pastor also observed that the out-of-town youths were a big hit with the locals.

"It was the topic of conversation for 10 or 12 days. The gossip in Seneca County was positive; it might have been the only place in the world where somebody wasn't getting run down by gossipers," Father Gramkee joked.

Stars shine at 1993 Eddie Meath Game



AQ's Wegman, McQ's DeLuca named MVPs

Philip Wegman (center), an Aquinas Institute graduate, carries the ball downfield as Ben DeLuca (ground) of McQuaid Jesuit misses the tackle during the annual Eddie Meath All-Star Game held at the University of Rochester's Fauver Stadium this past Sunday, Aug. 1. Wegman was named outstanding offensive player for the West, and DeLuca took East team honors as top defensive player. The game, won 14-12 by the East, featured several of the top football stars from Section 5 who were seniors during the 1992-93 school year.

Welcome day in Apalachin

APALACHIN — A seventh-grade welcome day will be held on Sunday, Aug. 8, for youths at both Apalachin's St. Margaret Mary Church and Owego's St. Patrick Church. The event will take place from 3 to 8 p.m. at St. Margaret Mary, 1110 Pennsylvania Ave.

This welcome day is open to seventh-graders as well as teens in grades 8-12.

For details, call Jan Borromei at 607/625-3191 or 625-4878.

Golf tournaments slated

Two golf tournaments to benefit local agencies are scheduled for next month.

A tournament for the Easter Seals Society of Monroe County will take place on Monday, Sept. 13, at Shadow Pines Golf Club, 600 Whalen Road, Penfield. Call 716/264-9550 to enter.

Action for a Better Community will hold a tournament on Monday, Sept. 20, at Green Hills Country Club, 226 Mendon-Ionia Road, Mendon. For details, call 716/325-5116.