

'Grandma Inez' finds way to keep promise to God

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

NEWARK — Inez Hamelinck can remember the days, when, as a child living near Pisa, Italy, she had to hide in caves while battles raged between Italian and Austrian forces during World War I.

You won't find Hamelinck hiding in caves — or her Newark home, for that matter — these days.

She visits St. Michael's School, 320 S. Main St., twice a week, setting up, serving food, zipping coats, cleaning tables, and offering a few encouraging words to the children who affectionately call her "Grandma Inez."

"They all know me as 'Grandma,'" she noted, adding with a chuckle, "I can't see the these kids calling me 'Mrs. Hamelinck.'"

Since the early 1980s "Grandma Inez" has been helping out during lunch times at the school, either by providing lunch-time supervision and relief for teachers in classrooms, or, as she has been doing this year, serving food in the school's gym. She also bakes cookies for the children on Christmas and Valentine's Day.

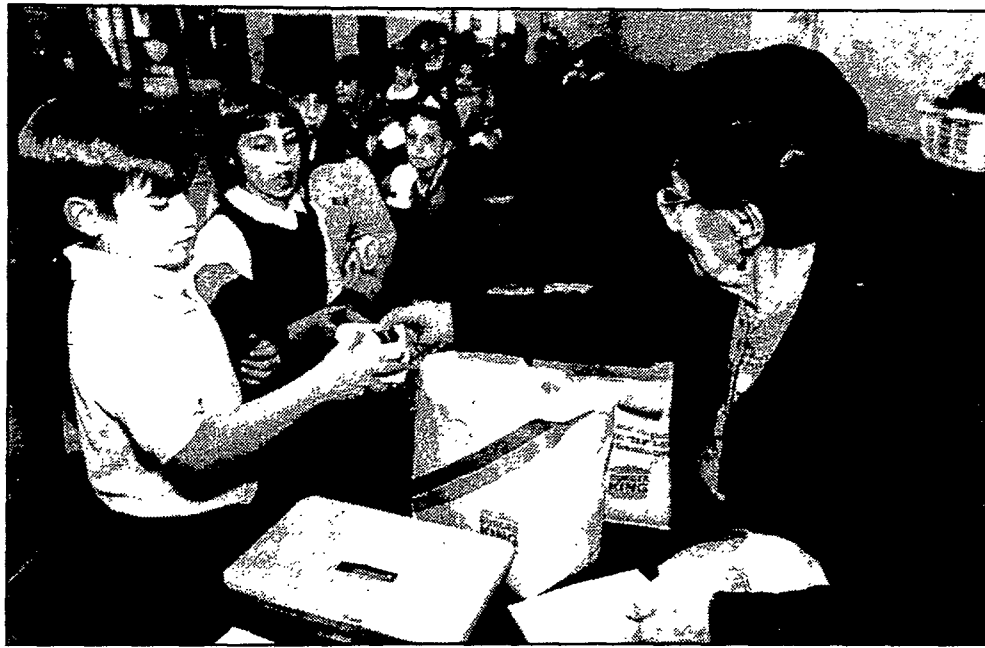
That Hamelinck offers a helping hand with food seems rather apropos. After all, Hamelinck was among those who helped organize fundraising spaghetti dinners to help pay for the construction of the only Catholic school in Wayne County, which opened in September, 1954.

"Father (Henry) Doerbecker decided he wanted a school," Hamelinck recalled of the parish's former pastor. "He said, 'Inez, you take charge of the dinners.'"

"She helped to build this school," acknowledged Kathleen Peters, St. Michael's current principal. "I never met a woman like her."

Hamelinck, a member of St. Michael's Parish since 1935, is also involved with the Altar Rosary Society, and has served as the treasurer of the Sacred Heart Mission Society since it began in the mid 1930s. She also attends daily Mass, opening up the chapel for the liturgies.

Meanwhile, as she did after serving lunch at the school Feb. 1, she also takes



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Twice a week, Inez Hamelinck, affectionately known as 'Grandma Inez' at St. Michael's School in Newark, serves lunch in the gym. Hamelinck has been helping out during lunch time since the early 1980s.



'Grandma' Inez helps second-grader Meghan Culver with a tricky zipper.

shopping her friends and relatives who can't drive. She has also taken a number of trips back to Italy since 1970, helped to drive each of her-four grandchildren to college, and has found time to be involved in the lives of her three great-grandchildren.

"I can't stay at home," Hamelinck said. "I'm too nosy. I like to get out to see what's going on in the world."

But Hamelinck's involvement with the school has added motivation.

She said she'll never forget the way St. Michael's faculty and staff treated her son, Joseph, after he was left partly

paralyzed due to complications brought on by measles.

"When he came here, the sisters really took care of him," Hamelinck explained. "I always made up my mind if I could ever help here to make up for what they did for my son, I would. I told God I would come and help here."

Hamelinck found time to keep that promise after raising her children — Joseph and his older sister, Elizabeth — and retiring from 32 years of working full- and part-time as a bookkeeper in the Newark area.

Now two days a week she leaves the home she shares with her husband August, to come to the school, set up and serve the children.

"I really enjoy the children," Hamelinck said. "Really, that's the reason I'm here."

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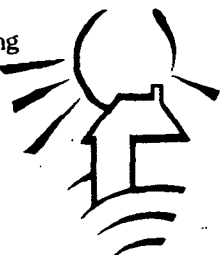
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