

Faith in the Workplace

Honest handyman shares God's gifts with others

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

GRECE — When Grace Merz has odd jobs to do around the house — ranging from small repairs to finding out who to hire for bigger jobs — she knows who to call.

She simply dials the number for "Frugal Fix It," a home-repair business run by Tony Gaudio, a parishioner of Irondequoit's St. Thomas the Apostle Church.

"He did so many things, I can't recall them all," Merz said. "He's very good. He's very honest. He's very conscientious."

Gaudio has also given her discounts, occasionally doing small jobs for free, or not charging her for the necessary materials.

"I do insist that he takes the money," Merz said. But, "if there's a situation where people can't pay, he says, 'Forget about it.'"

Father Ralph J. Fraats, parochial vicar at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, has also called upon Gaudio for his services. The handyman has done jobs for free or at low cost for St. George's Lithuanian Parish, where Father Fraats had served as administrator; for St. Thomas the Apostle, where, for example, Gaudio and his uncle, Joe Paris, installed the walls in the parish's adult education facility, the Irenaeus Center; and for various needy people in the community.

"There have been some widows in particular who don't have a husband around the house to do repairs," Father Fraats said. "He is a very honest man."

It seems Gaudio's also a very modest one.

"I don't want to make it seem like I want credit for what I'm doing," Gaudio said. "That's not what I'm doing it for."

"I figure there's a need for people that people can trust," he continued, "and aren't out to take advantage of people — who just want to work an honest day's work."

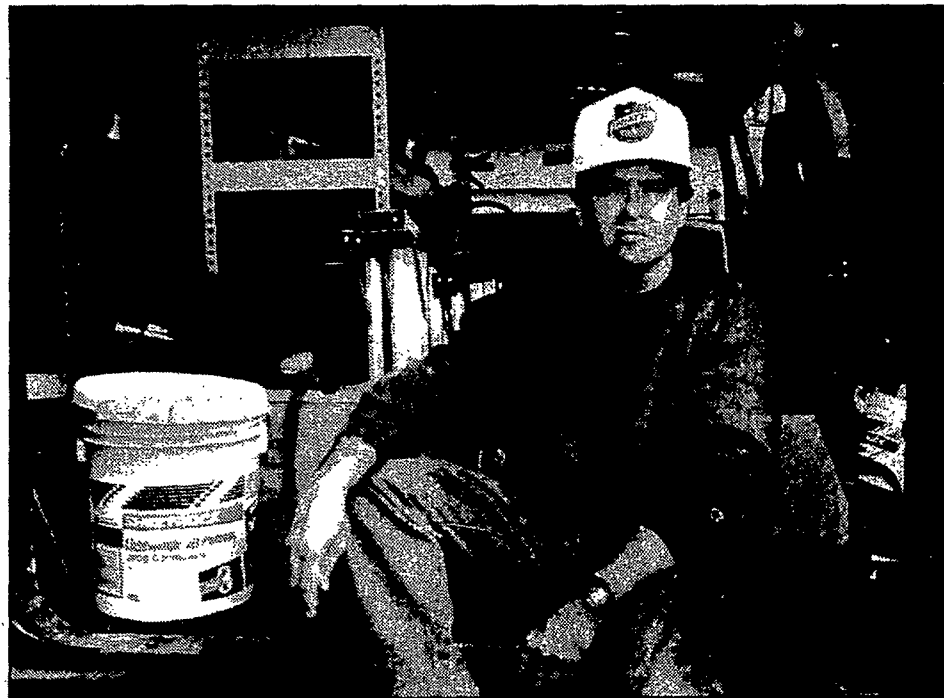
Gaudio's reputation is his chief form of advertising, he added. He gets most of his jobs by word of mouth from satisfied customers.

Gaudio tries to make time for jobs where he can help out people — while at the same time try to earn an income to help support his pregnant wife and son.

"I do charge — I've got to make a living," Gaudio said. But at the same time, he added, "When I see the people who are on fixed incomes, there are times when I let people slide. I know right off the bat by the surroundings. I know if they have it rough."

Gaudio has been pursuing his handyman business full time since 1990. He had worked as a welder working on bridges for the Monroe County Department of Transportation. He left that position to take a job with the sheriff's department as a guard in the county jail — and hated it.

"I didn't like the environment," he said. "I felt confined."



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Tony Gaudio, a parishioner at Irondequoit's St. Thomas the Apostle Church, runs 'Frugal Fix It' a home repair business. He says his faith is a key motivation for doing what he does.

So he quit that job to pursue home repair — something that he had been doing on the side for years, anyway. And he also found himself seeking ways to save his customers money — hence his company's name, "Frugal Fix It."

"If I saw somebody who needed help, and I had materials I could give them, I would," Gaudio said. "If I felt like doing something for free, I did."

Those materials were sometimes left after other jobs were completed. In some cases, cus-

tomers asking him to do home-improvement projects were throwing away perfectly good items or ones only needing to be repaired. He would save those goods and use them when a need arose.

At the same time he was always up front and honest, even with paying customers.

"If somebody needs a washer in a faucet, I don't tell them they need a new faucet," Gaudio explained. "I repair it."

Merz, for one, appreciates Gaudio's approach.

"He explains everything before

he starts the job," Merz said. "What it's going to look like, how much it's going to cost, how long it will take."

And if he had to leave and get supplies, Merz noted, unlike some other people she's hired, he doesn't add the time to his bill. "They just mark everything down to the penny," she said of other repairmen she has hired.

"It's just a matter of getting along with people and being honest and having a view that goes deeper than just padding

the pocket," Gaudio said. "I'm not on easy street, but that's not everything."

Indeed, because his schedule is fairly flexible, Gaudio has had the time to stay at home with his 4-year old son, Anthony. "A lot of fathers don't have that opportunity," he observed. "I had a chance to grow up with my son."

Beginning May 15, however, some of that time will be trimmed down, as Gaudio begins a six-month position with Rochester Telephone Corporation's installation and repair department. The steady paycheck will allow his wife, Jean, to take time off from her job to stay home with their new baby, which is due any time.

But, Gaudio noted that, even while working for the phone company, "I'll do my business on the side."

As for his motivation for his free and low cost work, Gaudio said the reason is simple.

"I see a lot of people who don't have what I have," Gaudio remarked. "I think it keeps my vision correct. I don't keep thinking about material things, about keeping up with people."

His faith is also a key motivation for doing what he does, Gaudio acknowledged.

"I'm thankful that I'm afforded the opportunity to get up every day and do a job," Gaudio said. "I thank the Lord for my healthy family, and I just give it back."

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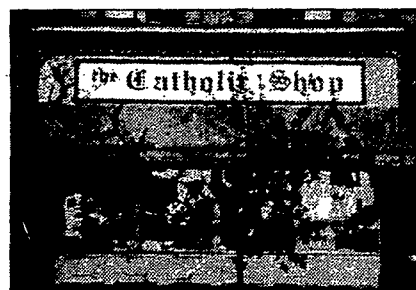
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Steve says that sometimes it's a challenge keeping a Christian attitude when faced with the inevitable hassles that a retail business presents. "We just remember during those stressful times that we're involved in what we're doing to promote our faith."

Steve is a parishioner at Holy Cross Parish in Syracuse, NY. He's head of the volunteer organization for the Lions group. He's also on the PTA of Bishop Grimes High School, and a member of the Northside Businessmen's Association.

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