



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Cynthia Blair, cook at Most Precious Blood School in Rochester, prepares bowls of punch June 19 for the school's kindergarten graduation ceremony.

Caterer says goodbye to school kitchen

Runs business despite blindness

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Cynthia Blair, cook at Most Precious Blood School, 219 Stenson St., recalled once putting her all into making a special, homemade tomato sauce for the students.

Although the students apparently enjoyed the sauce, Blair's ego was somewhat deflated by their verbal responses to her efforts.

"The children asked if the next time I could make Spaghettios," she said with a smile.

Fortunately for Blair, who runs a catering and pastry service with her husband, Michael, the students have generally reacted more favorably to her culinary efforts on their behalf. Unfortunately, however, as of this month, Most Precious Blood School, which housed a pre-kindergarten to second-grade program, has closed its doors.

Blair lamented Most Precious Blood's closing and its impact on the school's staff, parents and students.

"We're like a family," she commented. "Everybody cares about everybody."

Blair will also miss the school's kitchen, which looks out on MPB's gymnasium where a class of students was singing as she prepared one of the last lunches they were ever to eat there.

"This is my kitchen," Blair remarked. "Nobody moves anything here" during the day.

One of the reasons none of the MPB staff ever touched anything in the kitchen that Blair can see only well enough to distinguish between light and dark. Most of her sight has been destroyed over the course of several years by macular disease, which attacks the retina.

Yet, except for the presence of her black Labrador guide dog, Brent, visitors to Blair's kitchen might not even realize she is blind. Blair moves about the kitchen with ease, using such aids as a



Cynthia Blair and her guide dog, Brent, wait outside the door of Principal William Davis' office to obtain the number of students absent from school on June 19.

"talking" calculator and braille-coded microwave oven to do her work.

Blair has been steadily losing her sight since she was 14, yet evinces no bitterness whatsoever about her condition.

"I just figured that this is what I've been dealt," she said.

Her boss, MPB's Principal William Davis, remarked that Blair's visual impairment has yet to hamper her performance as an employee. He noted, for example, that when the school's secretary was sick last fall, Blair filled in for her.

"She's like any other employee," he said.

He added that Blair headed the school's fundraising efforts and has long been an active parishioner at MPB.

"She's amazing, she does everything," he said.

Blair has always loved to cook, but she really developed her skills while studying political science in the late 1970s at the University of Buffalo, where she met her husband. A resident adviser in a dormitory with 28 men and only four women, Blair was often in demand for her ability to prepare a delicious meal for hungry students.

Her catering business, Cynful Delights, grew out of similar demands by friends and acquaintances for her work at parties. Indeed, her job at MPB actually grew out of volunteer work preparing lunches there.

"It all just kind of fell into place," she said of becoming the school's cook.

Now that she has lost her steady income from MPB, Blair said she is looking for an hourly job to supplement the money she makes from her business. Her expenses include her son's tuition at McQuaid Jesuit Middle School where she is vice president of the home/school association.

Yet, wherever she is hired, she wants her employer to trust in her ability as a professional, and not pity her for her visual impairment.

"I'm not a poor blind person," she said. "I'm educated and I have skills."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Cynful Delights can be reached at 716/254-1622.

Father Weckesser marks 40 years as Maryknoller

Rochester native Father James R. Weckesser celebrated 40 years as a Maryknoll priest at celebrations June 24-26 at the Maryknoll headquarters in Ossining, N.Y.

Born June 7, 1928, to Joseph L. and Mary Casey Weckesser, Father Weckesser attended St. Augustine's School and St. Andrew's Seminary before entering the Maryknoll order in September, 1948. He was ordained a priest on June 11, 1955.

From 1955-78, Father Weckesser served in parishes in Chile. He was appointed regional superior of Chile in 1978, then that same year was elected the order's assistant general. He returned to Chile in 1984, and served briefly in Bolivia in 1986 and 1987. He then returned to Chile where he is now a member of the Eclesial Christian Community Team in the southern zone of the Archdiocese of Santiago.

Aquinas alumni plan summer reunion days

ROCHESTER — Several reunions have been planned this summer for Aquinas Institute alumni.

These get-togethers are as follows:

- Class of 1940 — Aug. 12 dinner party at The Party House in Chili. Call Wendel Kleehammer at 716/423-2172 for details.

- Class of 1960 — July 22 golf outing at Salmon Creek Country Club in Ogden. Call Bob Murguet at 716/392-4047 or Larry Hurley at 716/227-1564.

- Class of 1965 — Aug. 11-13 golf, sock hop and family picnic. Call Bernie Iacovangelo at 716/889-4306.

- Class of 1980 — July 30 picnic at Webster Park. Call Gerry Antomoso at 716/787-0599.

- Class of 1985 — Aug. 5 dinner at Bathub Billy's. Call Bill Padulo at 716/621-2973.

- Class of 1990 — July 29 picnic at Ellison Park. Call Jeff Page at 716/594-4014 or Sara Kavanagh at 716/426-2883.

Pastoral Office to begin summer schedule in July

ROCHESTER — The Pastoral Office will operate with summer hours July 10 through September 1.

Business hours will run from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and 8 a.m. to noon on Fridays. The lunch periods will be reduced from an hour to 45 minutes, from 12:30 p.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Diocesan Catholic Charities will not observe summer hours.

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