

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Parish begins oral history project to preserve past

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

Walter Marriott helped to create the archives of Rochester's St. Michael's Church.

Now, he is in them.

Marriott, who has served as an usher at the North Clinton Avenue church for 55 years, was one of the first people videotaped Jan. 7 in an effort to begin an oral history for the parish.

"I'm grateful for all the parishioners that made St. Michael's what it is," Marriott declared on tape.

The videotaping effort got underway following the parish's "Homecoming Christmas Mass." For the past few years, the parish has held the Mass — which includes music by the St. Charles Borromeo Choir — and tours of the historic church. This year, organizers added videotaping of the church and interviews to capture people's memories of the parish.

According to Mary Beth Fuehrer, who helped to coordinate the videotaping, the idea for the oral history came from Evelyn Fleming, one of the people behind the homecoming Masses. Fuehrer's nephew, Martin Mendola, did the taping.

"This really is a start for us just to get something documented," Fuehrer remarked.

On camera, Marriott recalled the four-lane bowling alley built for parishioners in the original church building (located



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Walter Marriott (left) an usher at Rochester's St. Michael's Church for 55 years, speaks on camera for the parish's oral history as Mary Beth Fuehrer looks on and Martin Mendola (right) videotapes.

behind the current church), and his efforts to create the archives last August along with Joe and Mary Lou Hasenauer and James Malloy.

Rosemarie Rister McDonald, a member of the St. Michael's School class of 1949, and her sister, Lydia Rister Garrity, of the class of 1952, recalled that their grandfather attended the Chicago World's Fair in 1890 where he saw a stained glass window depicting Daniel in the lion's den entered into an ecclesiastical art contest.

"Our grandfather saw the window that had won first prize and (learned) that it

was going to a church in Rochester," McDonald recalled.

Although he never made it to Rochester — he returned to Germany — the window did, having been commissioned for St. Michael's and having been sent to the fair from the church. Ironically, his daughter later became a member of the parish.

Meanwhile, Bob Staub, who graduated from the parish school in 1938, recalled that his grandfather was one of the people who escorted the cornerstone for the current St. Michael's Church from St. Joseph's Church to the site of St. Michael's in 1888. Everyone who contributed \$5 toward the construction of the new church, he said, was able to walk with the cornerstone, holding on to ribbons attached to it.

Staub also pointed out that some of the magnificent stained glass windows in the church cost as little as \$1,000 apiece when first installed.

However, he continued, "I remember when they re-leaded them all. It cost \$1,000 apiece."

These and other recollections will become part of the parish's growing archives, Marriott said. The archives are housed in the former sisters' chapel located behind the sacristy.

Eventually, Marriott said, he like to install a videocassette recorder and television so that people can view the oral history.

"Like a Saturday afternoon, grandparents can come with their grandchildren and watch, maybe pay a quarter," Marriott suggested.

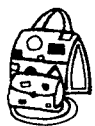
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