

Retirement

Age poses no problems for RSVP volunteer

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

GATES — Every Wednesday, Mary Fiore rides a bus across town to St. Ann's Nursing Home in Irondequoit. There, she serves the residents at the weekly "Bar Day."

Every Thursday, the St. Andrew's parishioner heads from her Gates apartment to the Park Ridge Nursing Home in Greece to visit, pray and talk with the residents there and "give them a little cheering up."

The irony is that at 98, Mary is probably older than most of people she helps. But blessed with good health, the Dunn Towers resident is not about to slow down.

"If I don't go there, I wouldn't have a place to go," she said. "Once a week, I have something to look forward to."

Besides, she noted, "I like to do something for somebody else."

Mary has been doing "something for somebody else" on a voluntary basis at St. Ann's for 28 years — after raising her own two children, working for many years, and volunteering at another nursing home years ago.

Meanwhile, her daughter, Ann Sylvester, has followed her mother's lead. She, too, volunteers at St. Ann's, serving, for example, as a eucharistic minister, in addition to volunteer activities at her parish, St. Cecilia's.

The 79-year-old got involved at St. Ann's about 13 years ago, she said, "because my mother was there, and when my children grew up they left home."

Now her husband Vincent volunteers at St. Ann's as well, helping with transporting residents and with the recreational therapy program. The 75-year-old retiree



Mary Fiore (right), 98, takes a break from serving residents of St. Ann's Nursing Home on "Bar Day," while daughter Ann Sylvester dances with another volunteer.

Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), a 25-year-old federal program sponsored locally by LIFESPAN (the former Regional Council on Aging).

Mary Jane Gissin, RSVP's director, said approximately 650 seniors volunteer through RSVP at

not-for-profit agencies in Monroe County — including nursing homes, hospitals, the Seneca Park Zoo and GEVA Theatre.

"We match the particular person's talents and skills and requirements for being a volunteer with (the needs) of an agency," Gissin explained.

The volunteer activity can be open-ended, or, if the volunteer prefers, a short-term project.

"The whole point," Gissin said, "is that when you volunteer, you should be having fun."

In addition to helping to match volunteers with programs, RSVP can partly reimburse the volunteers for mileage or bus fares.

"That makes a difference for some people," Gissin said. "It helps them to be able to volunteer."

started out just driving his wife. "Some days she wouldn't want to drive alone," he said, "so slowly but surely I got into that."

Although their volunteer activities began years ago, the trio has linked up recently with the Retired

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The program also has an annual recognition meal for volunteers. The Sylvesters are appreciative of the support they get through the program.

"They give us a beautiful luncheon every year," Ann remarked. "They are very nice with the volunteers," Vincent added.

But the couple's willingness to visit people in nursing homes goes beyond just being treated well by RSVP.

"It makes us happy to see the other people happy," Ann said. "It gives us a lot of joy."

"You realize we're lucky," Vincent noted. "We just haven't gotten those ailments yet."

Mary, meanwhile, has even been able to spread her faith.

"Before I went to St. Ann's, I

Continued on next page

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