

## FEATURE

## Former athletic director pens poems

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

## CANANDAIGUA

George C. Monagan, a 71-year-old parishioner at St. Januarius Church in Naples, sits in his dining room, reading from *Midvale Terrace*, a collection of his poetry published in 1994.

He turns to his poem "Report Cards," which tells of a priest giving him his year-end grades in elementary school.

"Father reviews my card, Department my best grade / an accident of disposition rather than effort / His terse comment 'Your academic average / would make a great golf score!' / I naively took this to be a compliment / I never did make altar boy ..."

"I try to have some sort of humor in my poems," said Monagan, who spent 43 years as a health educator, coach and athletic administrator before retiring in the late 1980s. "I think if you're going to live a life and enjoy it, you have to look at it with a sense of humor. I think it helps you get through things."

But Monagan said he's capable of writing weightier material — he then read one poem about his naval combat experiences in World War II and another piece about an abused woman who lived in his neighborhood when he was growing up.

One day the woman, a prostitute, shouted from her house to Monagan and asked him to go to the store and buy a pack of cigarettes for her. When he returned with the cigarettes, he overheard "a coarse voice" ordering her around, as he wrote in "Stella":

"She looked to the voice, then back to me / 'Thanks neighbor,' she said / her hand touched my cheek / I could smell the fear."

Monagan has always been interested in



writing, but said he seriously began writing poetry only after retiring from his duties as athletic director for two decades at Monroe Community College in Rochester.

Monagan credited several instructors at Writers & Books, a Rochester-based organization, with nurturing his talent, and noted that he has participated in the group's public readings.

He's published four chapbooks of poems, including one titled *I'm Not Old, I'm Chronologically Gifted*. He's seen his work make the pages of such journals as *New Voices*, *River Run* and *Coffeehouse Poets Quarterly*.

He also currently serves as president of the 20-member Rochester Poets' Society, which meets monthly to read and discuss its members' work, he said.

For the last four years, Monagan has

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sponsored a yearly poetry contest in Ontario County for teenagers and adults, and has also run poetry readings and workshops for young people. He stressed the need for older people to stay involved

in young people's lives, a philosophy he practiced as a teacher, he said.

"I always tried to deal with the students with dignity and respect," he said. "I found that I always got back from the students almost exactly what I gave them."

Prior to working at MCC, Monagan started the athletic program at McQuaid Jesuit High School in Rochester when it opened in the mid-1950s. He also taught health education in the Penfield School System in the '50s, he said. He shares a love for both athletic and literary achievement, he noted.

"Sending my (poetry) out and getting it accepted sort of gives me as big a rush as winning a basketball game did," he said.

Through the years, Monagan, who has coached a number of championship basketball teams, also authored a number of books on subjects ranging from how to develop a positive mindset to how to develop a winning dunk shot. He is currently working on a 30,000-word adventure story for boys, he added.

Monagan and his wife Joan have four children and four grandchildren, including one 12-year-old granddaughter, Emily, who shares his penchant for poetry. Emily's poetry was recently published in a children's magazine *American Girl*, he said, adding that she's read his work.

"She said 'Grandpa, I really like your smiles,'" he recalled with a smile.



Matthew Scott  
George Monagan reads from his booklet, *I'm Not Old, I'm Chronologically Gifted*, at a reading at Chronos Books & Music in Henrietta this summer.

## Aging conference planned

The University of Rochester Medical Center has scheduled a conference on "Successful Aging and the New Millennium," Sept. 24-26, at various venues in Rochester.

The event, the first annual Rochester Conference on Health, will address such topics as: the biology of aging, medical advances helping to keep seniors healthy, teaching physicians to care for older patients and how society can deal with an aging population.

The conference will also include a reception and concert at the Eastman School of Music, and a dinner and

keynote address by Dr. William Hazard, author of *Preventive Gerontology: Making Usual and Successful Aging Synonymous*, at the Memorial Art Gallery.

Most of the conference sessions will take place at the School of Medicine and Dentistry's Whipple Auditorium. Some sessions will take place at Monroe Community Hospital and the Rochester Riverside Convention Center.

Registration is \$195 prior to Sept. 12, \$245 after.

For information, call the Medical Center's Office of Continuing Education at 716/275-4392.

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