

## FEATURE

# Woman spreads cheer through her community

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

WAVERLY — If residents of this Tioga County village haven't bumped into Mary Schmiegl lately, chances are they don't get out very much.

Schmiegl covers the Waverly area, and beyond, with her goodwill activities. Although she just turned 80 years old on Sept. 25, Schmiegl enjoys keeping a full itinerary.

"Thank God she does have good health, because she's needed by a lot of people," remarked Doris Sindoni, a close friend.

Schmiegl has transported Sindoni to and from weekday Mass at St. James Church for the past five years, after Sindoni's declining health prevented her from driving any longer.

"She's the one who keeps me going," said Sindoni, who is blind in one eye and walks with difficulty. "If I say, 'I can't get up today,' she'll say, 'Oh, yes you can.'"

Schmiegl's busy day often begins by attending 8:30 a.m. Mass with Sindoni at St. James, where they are parishioners. The only exception is on Wednesdays, when Schmiegl goes for perpetual adoration at Church of the Epiphany in Sayre, Pa., just south of Waverly.

After Mass, the two friends frequently go out for breakfast at various eateries in the village. Schmiegl also spends many mornings taking people who can't drive, such as Sindoni, shopping; and buying groceries for shut-ins.

And on days that Sindoni is not feeling well, Schmiegl dutifully shows up with groceries at her home.

"She seems to know what I want before I ask for it," Sindoni remarked. "She'll say, 'I thought you might need this, so I bought it' — and she's right."

Schmiegl's volunteer work among Waverly residents also includes visiting hospitals and nursing homes, and assisting with the local Meals on Wheels program.

In addition, Schmiegl drives to Elmira Correctional Facility every Thursday to take part in Bible study. Her buoyant attitude is evident when she speaks about her efforts to spread spirituality to inmates.

"It's wonderful if they retain it when they get out. Hopefully, some of them



Mary Schmiegl, right, helps Doris Sindoni with her grocery shopping in Waverly after Mass at St. James Parish.

will," Schmiegl said.

According to Father Thomas Watts, pastor of St. James, Schmiegl's cheerful outlook inspires all who come in contact with her.

"Mary is always positive. Last February, everybody would be moaning and groaning about the weather and she'd say, 'Oh, that's all right.' She got me through the winter," Father Watts said with a laugh.

Most of Schmiegl's efforts are conducted behind the scenes, Sindoni observed. "She doesn't put on a show for anyone. She's so down to earth," Sindoni commented.

Indeed, Schmiegl said she gets uncom-



Mary Schmiegl, center, sings during Mass, along with Teresa Costello, left, and Doris Sindoni at St. James Church, Waverly, Oct. 10.

fortable when she's praised for her volunteer work.

"It's the way of life. You do what you have to do, when you have to do it. It's just something that happens," Schmiegl said.

Schmiegl, who also enjoys attending charismatic Masses, said much of her

ongoing spirituality can be traced back to the first charismatic Mass she attended in 1969.

"The Lord came into my life. It was just wonderful," Schmiegl recalled. "I knew he had been up there, but I didn't feel that closeness until then."

Schmiegl does allow herself leisure time. After taking an afternoon nap, she



enjoys meeting up with friends for evening activities.

"I love to play cards," Schmiegl said.

One memorable social event was the celebration of her 80th birthday with all

six of her children, who traveled from as far away as California and North Carolina to attend the festivities.

"We had a great party!" Schmiegl exclaimed.

Schmiegl's list of friends and well-wishers is so lengthy, she added, that her birthday observance was spread out over several weeks.

"I've been celebrating since August. I just got a card yesterday," Schmiegl remarked in an October interview.

And the daily "family" Schmiegl has acquired at St. James continues to sing her praises all year long.

"She's just been loved by everybody," Sindoni commented.

Sindoni said she voiced her appreciation to Schmiegl shortly after attending All Saints Day Mass with her earlier this month.

"I told Mary that I prayed for my saint today. She said, 'Who's that?' I said, 'It's you,'" Sindoni recalled.

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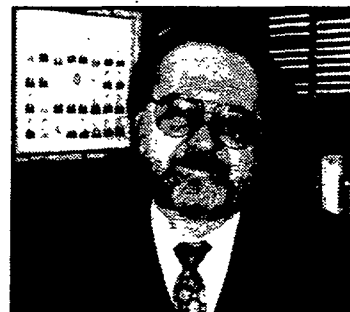
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