

Angels Among Us

Second chances fill menu at parish's restaurant

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Few employers would go out of their way to hire someone convicted of assault or armed robbery. But Jennifer K. Deas, manager of Rogers House Restaurant, owned and operated by Corpus Christi Church, would put an ex-offender at the top of her list of prospective employees.

"I want you to have a prison record," Deas said. "I want you to be a criminal, and I want you to be an alcoholic or a drug user."

There's one catch, however. If you want to work at Rogers House Restaurant, you have to commit to overcome the destructive urges and habits that qualified you for the job in the first place, she said.

"Come work here, and we'll show that (life) can be different," Deas said.

That's because Rogers House Restaurant — which opened 10 years ago on Dec. 22 — is part of an overall effort by Corpus Christi to rehabilitate ex-prisoners, according to Joe Buggie, who is a prison ministry volunteer along with his wife, Cathy.

Corpus volunteers make regular visits to area prisons where they conduct two-hour group sessions with offenders, Buggie said. Six groups of volunteers meet at such places as the Monroe County Jail and the Groveland Correctional Facility, he added.

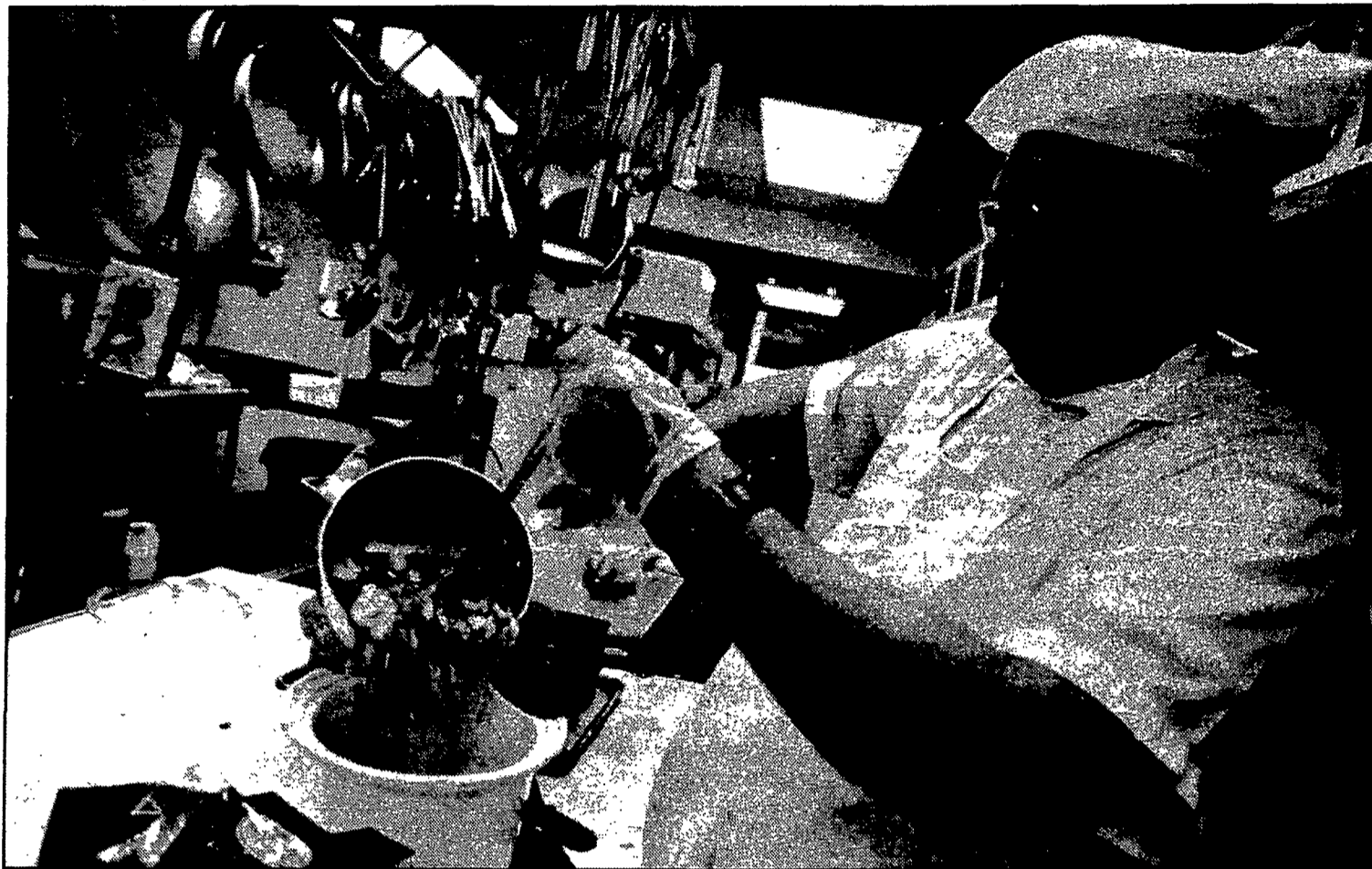
Some of the men paroled from area prisons may be eligible to live at Rogers House, a home for ex-offenders that opened in 1980, and that is operated separately from the restaurant of the same name, Buggie said. In addition to participating in programs designed to help them readjust to society, most residents at Rogers House also work at the restaurant one to two days a week, he said. The men receive a stipend for their work.

"For many of them, it's their first job," Buggie said of the ex-offenders at Rogers House Restaurant. "They have to learn to get along with people, to be responsible, to stay on schedule."

Although women ex-offenders do not live at Rogers House, they do work at the restaurant, Buggie said.

Jim Smith, director of Rogers House residence, and restaurant manager before Deas, added that the parish is exploring opening a residential program for female ex-offenders.

Deas noted that at any one time, up to five ex-offenders work at the restaurant for periods from three months to as many as 15. She added that 200 volunteers — 30 to



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Recovering drug abuser Frank Moore is a cook at Roger's House Restaurant on Central Park, Rochester.

40 on a steady basis — help keep the restaurant going.

One such volunteer is Joan Fitzgerald, a parishioner who serves on the restaurant's 10-member board of directors. Fitzgerald said she likes working on behalf of Rogers House Restaurant — as well as eating there — because the atmosphere is more caring than what a diner might find at a typical restaurant.

Deas said that the restaurant has employed other people — homeless people, or people struggling with addictions — who are trying to reenter society's mainstream like ex-offenders. Rogers House Restaurant exists to make good employees out of all of them, she said.

"The only thing I provide is job readiness," she said. "I teach people to get to work on time, to be clean and neat, and to be responsible."

Like many of her employees, Deas, 36, has overcome considerable obstacles herself, putting behind a life of crime, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and violence.

"I know that anybody didn't give me this



Laverne Miller prepares eggs for omelettes Dec. 16. He does various kitchen duties including washing dishes.

job, but God," she said.


She credited the parish for hiring her as manager after she graduated — with honors — with a food service degree from Monroe Community College, which she attended after being released from prison in the early 1990s. Deas also credited Bethany House of Hospitality, a shelter for women and children in Rochester, for helping her set her life straight.

How effective is Corpus' prison ministry to ex-offenders? According to Buggie, about 85 percent of the ex-offenders the parish aids have never returned to prison. One such former Rogers House Restaurant employee, who now volunteers at the restaurant, is Edward Randolph.

"I had a degree, but I never had any work ethics," Randolph said of his past. However, he admitted his upbringing was better than that of many ex-offenders, who often were abused and neglected.

Randolph said he came from a stable family, went to college, and had a job as a Medicaid auditor until he lost it in 1987. That event led him to develop a crack cocaine habit, which he supported by break-

Continued on next page



ANTHONY
FUNERAL CHAPEL

2305 Monroe Avenue
Rochester, New York 14618
244-0770

1031 Ridge Road
Webster, New York 14580
872-6380

**Wishing You and Your Family
a Joyous Holiday Season
from**



The Shire at Culverton
ADULT HOME

2515 Culver Road • Rochester, NY 14609 • 467-4544



You are cordially
invited to

MIDNIGHT MASS

at the beautifully renovated
SAINT ANNE CHURCH
1600 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, New York

11:00 • Organ Prelude
11:30 PM • Choir Preludes
12:00 AM Solemn Mass at Midnight

Choral Music of Hassler: *Missa Secunda* (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei); Handel, *Glory to God*; Kreckel: *Under the Stars*; Holst: *In the Bleak Midwinter*; Chant: *A Child is Born in Bethelhem, Of the Father's Love Begotten*; Praetorius: *Psallite*; Bruckner: *Hail Thou Long Expected Jesus*; and more sung by the twenty voice mixed choir of Saint Anne Church.
Organ Music of D'Aquin: *2 Noels*; Bach: *In Quiet Joy, In Thee is Joy*, *Maleingreau*; *Vers la Crèche*; Karg-Elert: *Adeste Fideles* - performed on the 1995 Konzelman Pipe Organ.

Thomas G. Donohue, Choirmaster

Brink Bush, Organist