

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Home to honor religious who served as volunteer

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

BRIGHTON — As if reverting to her days as a schoolteacher, Sister Mary Regina Feltz, RSM, 92, — tongue in cheek — chastised officials at Greece's Grande' Ville Senior Living Community for naming a wing after her.

"They were naughty," she said of Grande' Ville officials. "Naughty, naughty, naughty."

But one of the "naughty" officials said they had no choice — Sister Feltz had been not only one of Grande' Ville's most dedicated volunteers, but one of its liveliest.

"She used to make the staff laugh," recalled Virginia Bolton, Grande' Ville's director of social services. "She used to take the residents outside ..."

"And air them out," Sister Feltz said on cue.

Grande' Ville will open the wing honoring Sister Feltz sometime in March. It will serve 35 residents in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, Bolton said.

Sister Feltz spoke with the *Catholic Courier* Feb. 3 at the McAuley Residence, where she lives. Formerly known as the Infirmary of the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester, the residence is at the order's motherhouse.

Sister Feltz, a nun for 71 years now, began volunteering at Grande' Ville in the late 1970s. She remains a beloved figure there, even though health problems have pretty much kept her from being an active volunteer for the past six years, Bolton explained.

"There are still some residents there who were there when she was, and she is

still missed," Bolton said of Sister Feltz. She added that Grande' Ville's owner/administrator, Mike Panaggio, insisted on naming the renovated wing for the nun.

"The owner made the decision because he loved her and missed her," Bolton said.

Panaggio agreed with Bolton's sentiments.

"She just came into our lives, and we wouldn't let her go," he said, adding Sister Feltz was especially committed to residents without family or visitors. "She took a special interest in them."

Sister Feltz told the *Courier* she began volunteering at Grande' Ville after she retired from teaching in 1977.

"I'm ambitious," she said. "I wanted to do something."

What she did was spend several hours each week conversing with residents, teaching them crocheting and other crafts, and taking residents outside for walks, Bolton said. Sister Feltz added that the crafts were often sold to raise money both for the facility and for Catholic missions. To this day, Sister Feltz continues making rosaries out of rope cord for the missions.

That commitment is part of a long life of service to the church for Sister Feltz. Although she has dedicated her adult life to Christ, Sister Feltz said she wasn't a terribly religious girl growing up, and can't fully explain why she chose to become a nun.

A native of Penfield, she moved with her family to Pittsford at an early age. She attended St. Louis Church there along with her nine brothers and sisters. The last surviving member of her immediate family, she recalled that two of her brothers were Franciscan missionary priests



Greg Francis/Staff Photographer

Sister Mary Regina Feltz, RSM, jokes with friend Virginia Bolton, Grande' Ville Senior Living Community's director of social services, who visits her at McAuley Residence.

who served in Asia. She added that two of her sisters were Sisters of Charity who were cloistered in Buffalo, and mused that those sisters may have influenced her choice of religious life.

Was Sister Feltz destined for the religious life, given that her mother's name was Mary and her father's name was Joseph? Not if you ask her. She'll tell you that even though her father was a good Catholic, he wasn't exactly happy when he learned another one of his daughters had chosen religious life.

"I told my father, 'I'm going into the convent,'" she recalled telling him in her early 20s. "He said, 'You'll be back in a week.'"

Not only was her father wrong, but Sister Feltz pointed out that she wound up teaching for 43 years in diocesan primary schools. She started with St. Salome's, Rochester, in 1927. Her teaching career took her to other Catholic schools in Rochester, Greece, Clyde, Auburn, Elmi-

ra and Corning, she said. She added that she loved working with small children.

"They teach you to go back to your younger days," she said, noting that she enjoyed her charges' playfulness.

Sister Feltz moved to McAuley Residence in 1991. She no longer goes out to Grande' Ville, but facility officials like Panaggio and Bolton still keep in touch with her, she said. She joked that when the wing named after her is dedicated, she's not sure she will make the ceremony.

"I'll sleep during it," she said with a laugh.

"She's embarrassed by all the attention," Bolton said.

One thing Sister Feltz is definitely unembarrassed about is her life as a vowed religious. Although she's quite the joker, she turns thoughtful when asked what she likes best about being a nun.

"Religious life is a joy," she said. "It's a joy to serve the Lord all your life."

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