

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Woman is last living member of pioneer class

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — In 1973, Nazareth College in Rochester admitted its first male students, an event viewed with some wistfulness by one of the school's first alumnae, Evelyn McGrath.

"I wish they had done it earlier," McGrath said. "It was too late for me."

In fact, it was several decades too late for McGrath, who was one of the college's 25 original students when the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester opened the Catholic women's school in 1924. Although she bemoaned missing the male presence that Nazareth now enjoys, McGrath quickly pointed out that she only wanted men at the college for the wonderful intellectual stimulation they would have provided.

"The only one I would've married is my husband," she said with a smile, recalling her spouse, Thomas E. McGrath, an Eastman Kodak vice president who died in 1986. The St. Bonaventure University graduate married Evelyn in 1932.

She added that they had four children together, including Mary Ann Dempsey, who spoke to the *Catholic Courier* along with her mother in McGrath's apartment at The Highlands, a senior living complex.

McGrath graduated from Nazareth along with 14 other women in 1928. They all attended classes in the school's first building on Lake Avenue in Rochester. The school is now located on East Avenue in Pittsford.

Today, McGrath is the sole surviving member of Nazareth's first class, and will be a guest of honor at the school's inauguration of its new president, Dr. Robert A. Miller, on Friday, April 16, at 2:30 p.m. in The Arthur J. and Marie M. Callahan Theater on campus (see related story on Page 3).

McGrath attributed her love for the college to her love for education.

"I longed to hear and learn new things, and the more, the better," she said.

It was an affection instilled by her mother, Ann, who taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Victor, McGrath said. She added that her father also valued learning, and funded the higher education of all his children.

At Nazareth, McGrath majored in English and minored in French. She spoke of the school's professors, Sisters of St. Joseph, with great fondness.

"They were a faculty that I cannot say enough for," she said. "It was also a new experience for them, so we all kind of grew together."

When asked if she ever had any fears that she might be risking her future by attending a brand-new college without an established reputation, McGrath strongly responded in the negative.

"I would put our education against any



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Evelyn McGrath, right, walks with daughter Mary Ann Dempsey at The Highlands, a senior living complex in Pittsford, April 1.

college education — even in those first four years," she said of Nazareth. "I didn't feel it was taking a chance ... We were delighted to have a new college that wasn't so expensive. None of us were rich people."

She also remembered she and her fellow students would invite the sisters out for picnics and other social events on a regular basis. She doubted whether students in later years were as close to the faculty as Nazareth's first class was.

"We knew them as friends as well as teachers," she said of the nuns.

After college, McGrath taught for a year in a Catholic elementary school in Buffalo where her brother, the late Father Eugene Regan, was stationed as a diocesan priest. However, she found teaching not to her liking, and returned to Rochester where she eventually met her husband and also worked for five years as a secretary for a manufacturing firm. She left her job to raise her children.

In good health, McGrath noted that when she was younger, she prayed to God that no matter how long she lived, she would always have command of her faculties. In fact, her daughter attributed McGrath's good health to her vibrant spiritual life.

"She's been a faithful daughter of the Lord," Dempsey said.

However, given the fact that she has lived this long, McGrath joked that she forgot to put a time limit on her life when she prayed to God to preserve her faculties in old age. Those faculties allow her to enjoy the fact that she is grandmother to 15 children, and great-grandmother to 19 children, she noted.

"I'll have a big funeral someday," she joked, remarking on her large family. "I'll hope I'll be in heaven at that time — so what will I care?"

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