

# SENIOR LIFESTYLES

## Parish program honors the gifts of older adults

By Lee Strong  
Associate editor

GREECE — Jeanne Carroll was looking for a saint.

Specifically, the senior activities coordinator for Greece's Holy Name of Jesus Parish was trying to identify the patron saint of older adults.

"I had never seen anything about a patron saint for older adults, so I started researching," Carroll said, adding, "and couldn't find anything."

Finally, from a list of potential patrons, she unofficially designated one of her own: St. John the Evangelist.

"John was the youngest Apostle, the only one who was not martyred," she explained. "He lived to be 98. He lived his life serving Jesus and spreading the word of God."

Carroll's quest for a patron saint was part of an effort to honor seniors in her parish for "serving Jesus" and the community.

The image of St. John graced a holy card distributed to seniors in the parish at weekend Masses May 2/3 to mark the facts that 1999 is the U.N. International Year of Older Adults, and that May is Older Adults Month. Carroll, who spoke briefly at the

Masses and wrote an article for the parish bulletin about honoring seniors, also composed an original prayer for the card.

"Grant that I, like St. John, may share judiciously the gift of wisdom I have gained through life experiences," Carroll wrote. (See card at right.)

"I tend to think we forget the wisdom and experience people gain from living long lives," she explained. "I get so much out of hearing what life was like for them and connecting it with the world today."

In our youth-oriented culture, she continued, we tend "to leave older adults out of the loop."

Unfortunately, even older adults sometimes fall prey to this kind of thinking, she noted.

"There are older people who have a hard time being older just because they are afraid of being older — just because there is a stigma in this society," Carroll observed.

But she learned a different way of looking at aging from her own mother.

"I remember my mom when she turned 70," Carroll said. "I sort of teased her, 'Well, how does it feel to be 70?' She said, 'I'm the same person. I'm just a year older.'"

Carroll said she had consulted with the



Dear Lord,

They say growing older is not for sissies. Give me strength to deal with the losses I experience as part of growing older. Your servant St. John lived a long life and was known for his wisdom. Grant that I, like St. John, may share judiciously the gift of wisdom I have gained through my life experiences.

I enjoy my independence and live my life serving You and serving others. If I find limitations in my life now, help me to avoid false pride by accepting others serving me. Grant me patience to deal with those who see me as an old person rather than an individual who has grown older.

Help me to continue sharing those gifts you have bestowed upon me and to continue to grow spiritually in your love.

And Lord, help me to remember that, no matter how old I am, I am always a Child of God.

Amen

Prayer by Jeanne Carroll

Mercy Center With the Aging about ways to let seniors know they are welcome and valued during May.

The weekend celebration was just one of the ways the parish honors older adults.

The religious education program, for example, hosted a pasta luncheon for seniors April 27.

The parish will have a special Mass and luncheon Oct. 1, International Older Adults Day.

Meanwhile, the parish offers Project CARE, which matches volunteers with older adults who need help with yard work, transportation or housework, or just occasional visits.

The parish also has a group called "The Fun People," through which seniors go on trips, or hear speakers on such topics as arthritis and tai chi.

In addition, Carroll coordinates Ministry of Praise, through which people who can't get out receive monthly letters with prayer requests. Beyond the value of the prayers, the goal of the program is to help participants to feel connected to the parish.

As for the activities May 2/3, Carroll suggested, "Maybe it will encourage other parishes to do something like this."

Thanks to Carroll, they will at least have a possible patron saint with whom to work.

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### YMCA building slated for housing

Work began in early May for a Providence Housing Development Corporation project to transform the former Elmira YMCA building into a 30-unit senior citizen housing facility.

The project, at 201 E. Church St., will

be known as Clemens Manor. It is being managed by Providence — an affiliate of the diocesan Catholic Charities office — in conjunction with the City of Elmira.

According to Maggie Bringewatt, Providence's executive director, the units will provide affordable housing for seniors whose incomes are less than \$12,000 for a single person and \$19,260 for two people. There will be 18 one-bedroom units and 12 two-bedroom units.

Bringewatt estimated the project's cost at \$4 million. Providence has secured a \$711,609 grant from the New York State HOME Program and is also receiving tax credits and low-interest loans from several sources.

Bringewatt expects the renovation to be completed by March 2000. Providence will begin accepting applications in the fall of 1999. Anyone seeking application information should call 1-800-388-7177, ext. 307.

The YMCA building, constructed in 1924, has been vacant for about 10 years and has noticeably deteriorated, Bringewatt said.

Because of codes related to the structure's historical status, she added, few changes will be made to the exterior.

"The appearance will be virtually unchanged from the outside. There are lots of historians looking over our shoulder," Bringewatt remarked.

Among the many overhauls slated for the interior, an elevator will be installed in the four-story building.

"It will be totally handicapped accessible," Bringewatt said.

The YMCA building is among several other Providence projects ongoing or recently completed in Elmira:

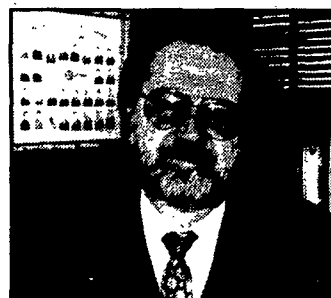
- A 40-unit senior citizen apartment complex on the east side, near St. Joseph's Hospital, opened in the spring of 1998. It is now close to full occupancy.

- A group of 10 houses on the north side, partially completed, will provide affordable single-family housing.

- Two independent-living projects for mentally ill adults — a 12-unit structure on the south side and a three-unit facility on the north side — are also in the works. These projects are being coordinated in conjunction with Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier.

— Mike Latona

### Thoughts to Consider



EDWIN SULEWSKI  
Funeral Director

#### How can I help someone who is grieving?

You can help in a number of special ways. Through reaching out and offering support in the form of listening and presence you will help a great deal. Ask your friend how they are doing. Mention the deceased by name and allow the bereaved to continue discussion about the deceased if they wish.

Many bereaved report feeling isolated. You can help by including them in your social groups. Contact with the grieving is most important during the period right after the death and in the three or four months following when the bereaved feel especially isolated. Reach out and make your presence felt.

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