

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Clyde woman marks 50 years of pilgrimages

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

CLYDE — Having just celebrated 50 years of organizing pilgrimages to Canadian religious sites, what is Margaret Colasurdo doing this summer?

Planning her 51st year, of course.

A member of St. John the Evangelist Parish and a lifelong resident of Clyde, Colasurdo realizes pilgrimages are not everybody's cup of tea.

But, she said, "Me, I can't wait till June 28 to get going. I've got my suitcase packed."

On June 28 a bus will pick up a number of pilgrims gathered in her front yard for a trip to St. Anne de Beaupre shrine in Quebec, St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, and the Basilica of Our Lady of the Cape. She has been taking buses of diocesan parishioners to those sites since she was 32.

"It's a pilgrimage, not a pleasure trip," Colasurdo stated.

On the drive up, she leads a recitation of the rosary. And once in Canada, the days are filled with devotions: the rosary, Mass, blessing of the sick, candlelight processions, Benediction and Stations of the Cross.

For the stations, "Anyone who can make it goes on their knees," Colasurdo said. She explained they make their way up on stairs on the Mount of St. Anne's. This year for the first time, however, worn knee cartilage will prevent her from doing so.

Once the group reaches its final destination of St. Joseph's, and conducts devotions there, some personal time is allowed.

"After that, I don't say you've got to do this or that," Colasurdo said.

Shrine administrators have taken notice of these pilgrimages. Two years ago, one noted that 1998 would be Colasurdo's 50th year for pilgrimages.

"I said how do you know, Father?" she recalled. "He said, 'We keep records.'"

So last July Colasurdo was honored at each of her pilgrimage's three sites, with cake, warm words at Mass, and presentations of religious plaques, artwork and a certificate.

In November Father Yoland Oulet traveled to Clyde from Cap de la Madeleine to honor her. He's the pilgrimage director assistant there.

When he asked her to be sure and continue the pilgrimages to Canada, she replied, "I'll go as long as I can."

"You can't express what you see there," she said. "There's something about it. You have to see it for yourself."

Between pilgrimages, Colasurdo also keeps busy running a food pantry at St. John's and ziti dinners for the church and community, and as a member of the Clyde Firemen's Ladies Auxiliary, standing by to take donuts and coffee to fires. Her scanner is going constantly. She also belongs to the Catholic Daughters.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Margaret Colasurdo holds a statue given to her on a pilgrimage to Cap de la Madeleine, in Quebec. She hosts a novena to St. Anne annually in July at her shrine (in background) in her back yard.

Next month, people will also be making pilgrimages to Colasurdo's own home for her annual novena to St. Anne July 17-26. Although fierce September storms blew down her four red maple trees, the grotto shrine stood firm in her back yard on Lock Street.

"That was the first thing I ran out to see," she recalled.

The shrine, with its 36-inch statue of Mary with St. Anne, suffered some cracks. But after the novenas have been completed, it will be repaired.

Colasurdo has been sponsoring nove-

nas at her shrine since 1955. Her husband, Joseph, who passed away 13 years ago, built it in 1954 because of a promise his wife had made when times were tough for them and their three sons.

"I said if St. Anne let me have my own house, I would have a shrine to her," she said. Two years later she bought the house on Lock Street.

"I made a promise as long as I would live I would have that novena and Mass there," she said. "I'll have it by myself if I have to. Because I asked for a favor and I got it."

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