

## FEATURE

## Country ambience still prevails at Mendon parish

Parish Profile  
St. Catherine,  
Mendon

By Mike Latona  
Staff Writer

MENDON — More and more handsome new homes are popping up in this quiet hamlet in the southeastern corner of Monroe County.

But in Harvey Limbeck's view, "suburban" is not an accurate tag for Mendon's St. Catherine of Siena Parish.

"I think we still view ourselves as a country parish," Limbeck said of the parish, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2002. He added that young professionals and their families who have joined St. Catherine of Siena in recent years seemingly enjoy the taste of country.

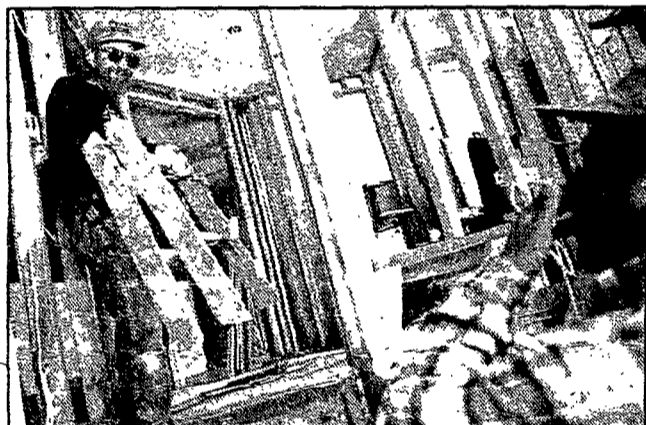
"I think we've absorbed them and turned them into farmers," he remarked.

Count Karen Zielinski among one of the "converts."

"We like the fact that there's not a big Wegmans or Tops in the neighborhood," said Zielinski, a religious-education instructor, whose family moved to the parish five years ago after living in the city of Rochester. St. Catherine of Siena is located just south of Routes 251 and 64, the main intersection in Mendon.

Barbara Reisteter and her family are first-year parishioners at St. Catherine's, having moved to the area from Atlanta last November.

"We were quite impressed when we came here," Reisteter said. "Atlanta is exploding and we felt the parish we



Ed Carney supervised a group of Habitat for Humanity volunteers July 22 that included workers from St. Catherine's.

were in was too big. Here, it's not too big and not too small."

Meanwhile, Limbeck and his wife, Yvonne, have belonged to St. Catherine's since 1970. Both serve as eucharistic ministers and lecturers, and are among numerous families who have been in the parish for decades.

"You think of Mendon and you think of suburban affluence, but there is certainly a strong mix of people who have been here a long time," said Father Jim Lawlor, pastor since 1998. He explained that many of St. Catherine's 980 families live near the borderline between Livingston and Ontario counties — farming areas that are still largely unaffected by suburban sprawl.

Worshippers at the church can usually count on a dose of informality, Limbeck said.

"I can wear my shorts to church," he remarked.

"Or my ski pants on the way home from Bristol," Zielinski added.

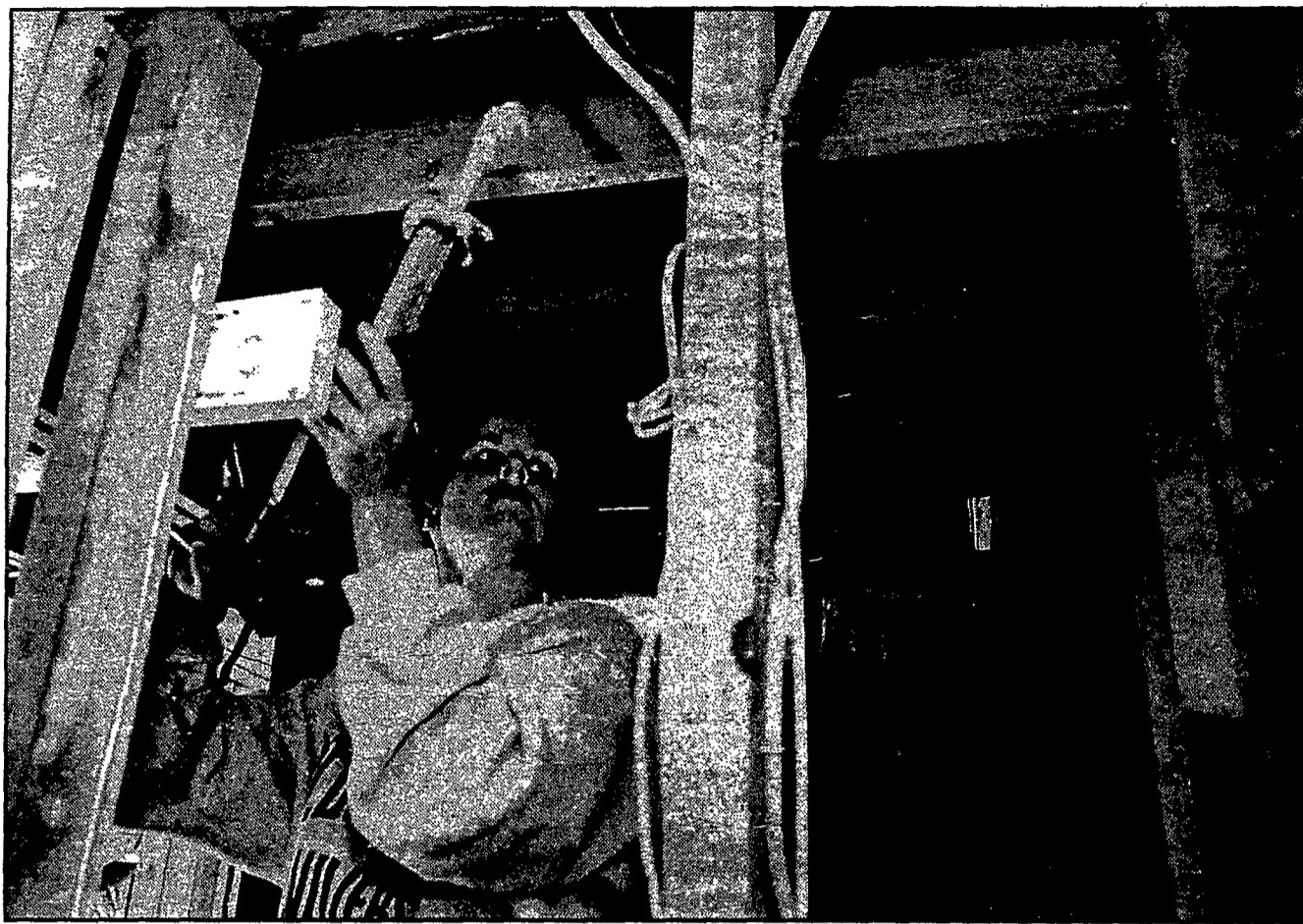
This comparatively casual atmosphere was likely influenced by Msgr. Albert H. Schnacky, who used to celebrate Sunday Mass while his beloved dog, Heidi, lay at the altar. The charismatic priest began serving at St. Catherine's in 1956, became pastor in 1970, and stayed in that position until his sudden death in 1985. (His brother, Father Paul Schnacky, is a retired diocesan priest who resides at St. Ann's Church in Hornell.)

"They used to call him the 'Mayor of Mendon.' He knew everyone in town, and everyone knew him," Limbeck recalled.

While Msgr. Schnacky may have set a social tone for St. Catherine's, Father Lawlor credited Father Charles Latus — St. Catherine's pastor from 1986-98 and now the pastor at St. Rita's Church in Webster — for bringing the parish through some major structural changes.

A new church building, built onto the preexisting parish center named after Msgr. Schnacky, opened in 1992. However, Yvonne Limbeck recalled, there was serious debate about what would become of the original church, which was built in the early 1900s.

"People did not want to lose the little church," she said. It was decided to move the church across the St.



Christine Broomfield of Fairport lays down caulk for the drywall on a Habitat for Humanity house in Rochester on July 22. Christine attends St. Catherine's in Mendon, which is collaborating on the project with Church of the Transfiguration, St. Paul of the Cross, Mendon Presbyterian and Honeoye Falls Presbyterian churches.

John Powell/Photo intern



Habitat for Humanity volunteers are building several houses on Brown Street, Rochester, including this one.

Catherine's campus and attach it to the new church as well, thus creating three distinctive, interconnected buildings. The original church is now used as the daily Mass chapel.

Father Lawlor noted that Father Latus oversaw this unusual renovation in a way that satisfied all sides. "It was a brilliant move on the part of Chuck Latus and his committee," Father Lawlor commented.

With the abundance of young people in the parish, St. Catherine's might someday need all the space it can get. Gail Brooks, Christian formation coordinator, said there are 335 people enrolled in religious education (pre-K through eight). The grade six-eight students are also eligible for the youth-ministry program. Leslie Barkin, junior-high youth minister, said she draws from a base of 171 young parishioners. And Jennifer Knitter, senior-high youth minister, said the parish has 250 youths of high-school age.

Among St. Catherine's offerings for older parishioners, Yvonne Limbeck noted that the "Empty Nesters" offer such get-togethers as boat rides and pancake breakfasts. "There's no real aim other than socializing," she said.

Meanwhile, Father Lawlor said the parish is active in social ministry. Parishioners are helping build a Habitat for Humanity house in Rochester, and also have a long-standing association with such urban outreaches as St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center and St. Martin's Place.

Closer to home, St. Catherine's performs community outreach through Benincasa, a home for the dying located at 3880 Rush-Mendon Road (Route 251). Beverly Clark, a St. Catherine's parishioner and director of Benincasa, said the ministry has served 67 people since its opening in October 1996. She also noted that memorial donations for her husband, Deacon Gary Clark — St. Catherine's pastoral associate who died suddenly in 1995 — helped greatly toward buying the house that was converted into Benincasa.

Benincasa is an ecumenical outreach between St. Catherine's and area Protestant churches. More recently, St. Catherine's has joined up with Catholic parishes in another community initiative. This past month, St. Catherine's — in cooperation with St. Louis and Transfiguration parishes in Pittsford — launched a campaign in an effort to preserve Sabbath time.

Zielinski said her family has signed a statement asking that community sports groups not schedule activities on Sundays before 1 p.m. Father Lawlor added that 550 people from St. Catherine's alone had already signed the statement as of mid-July.

"Sometimes we overschedule ourselves ... we want to recapture that notion of Sabbath," Father Lawlor explained. "What we'll be doing in the future is try to talk with various commissioners, league gurus, what have you — and ask them 'Would you try to think about this when you're making your schedule next year?'"

## SNAPSHOT

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## Ministerial Staff:

Pastor: Father F. James Lawlor  
In residence: Father John P. Norris  
Weekend associate: Father William C. McCusker, SJ  
Pastoral associate: Sister Ruth Maier, SSJ  
Christian formation coordinator: Gail Brooks  
Christian formation administrator: Phyllis Hagen  
Secretary: Gina Downer  
Bookkeeper: Gail Wasilewski  
Parish pastoral council chair: Nick Steo  
Youth ministers: Leslie Barkin, Jennifer Knitter  
Music director: Chrisanne Yule