

FEATURE

Cloister and all, nuns play role during LPGA week

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — It would seem impossible to live next to Locust Hill Country Club for decades, and not see one bit of action at the annual Ladies Professional Golf Association event.

Yet not even Rochester's biggest sporting event of the year can cause nine Carmelite nuns to depart from the strict rituals of their cloistered community at Monastery of Our Lady and St. Joseph.

"It's business as usual," remarked Sister John, OCD, the monastery's prioress. The only chance of seeing any LPGA action, she said with a laugh, "is if someone hits a stray golf ball" onto their property.

The monastery is located at 1931 W. Jefferson Road and the golf course is at 2000 W. Jefferson Road. The Wegmans Rochester International will be held June 4-10, and will draw tens of thousands of people to Locust Hill.

Despite being cloistered, the nuns do have a distinct and welcome role during the tournament, which is celebrating its 25th year. They host a special Saturday-evening Mass, scheduled for June 9 this year. It should begin between 5 and 6 p.m., depending on what time tournament action ends that day.

The liturgy fills a definite need for spectators, volunteers and even some LPGA pros, said Ginny Kellogg, a locker-room attendant and former hospitality coordinator for the tournament.

"If you work early Sunday (the tournament's final round), there's no way you can get to Mass in the morning. And if you work late the night before, there's no way. So we put out signs all over the tournament that there's Mass across the street," said Kellogg, a parishioner at St.

Louis in Pittsford.

The Saturday Mass has been part of LPGA week since the early 1980s, and is usually celebrated by a priest from St. Louis Parish. Kellogg, who secures lecturers for that Mass, said she always tries to line up two LPGA pros.

"Dale Eggeling has done it a lot," Kellogg said.

Last year, Kellogg recalled, Eggeling and Cindy Figg-Currier agreed to be lecturers. But neither one of them got to the monastery in time for Mass, because they were playing in the final groups that Saturday. In fact, Eggeling was the Rochester International's third-round leader before finishing in third place behind champion Meg Mallon, while Figg-Currier came in fifth.

"You take your chances. Or, there might be a rain delay and the player won't be able to come in time," Kellogg said.

The congregation usually overflows at this Mass, said Sister Malachy, OCD.

"I see them on their folding chairs that they brought to the tournament. They sit in the back," remarked Sister Malachy,



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Sister Malachy, OCD, in the chapel of the (Carmelite) Monastery of Our Lady and St. Joseph on W. Jefferson Road May 24.

who has resided at the monastery for 25 years. Sister Malachy is the congregation's "out" sister — the only nun who usually meets with the public. As with the other nuns, she only uses her last name when absolutely required, such as the signing of legal documents.

The Carmelite monastery is open to the public all year long. Daily Mass is at

7:30 a.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. Saturday and Sunday most of the year. In addition, the chapel is open for private adoration from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

"Some people are kind of surprised because their churches are closed during the day," remarked Sister Magdalene, OCD, who has resided at the monastery since 1941.

During Mass, the nuns receive the Eucharist through a metal grate in the wall that separates them from the chapel where visitors sit.

These Carmelite nuns may go outdoors to their back yard, which is wooded in, but never see any of the other outside world except for medical reasons.

Their lives are devoted to prayer, Sister John said. She also emphasized that the separation from the public is not a burden.

"We chose this. We don't consider this a prison. We give ourselves completely to God," Sister John said.

"It's an all-around family life," Sister Magdalene added.

The cloistered nuns do express an interest in the LPGA tournament's outcome, even though they're not witnesses to the event. "Someone tells us who's ahead, or who has won. And we pray for them," said Sister John, who came to the monastery in 1969 and was named prioress last December.

Though the nuns may be inconspicuous at Locust Hill, the same cannot be said for their monastery's powerful chimes that ring out, on schedule, seven times per day. In fact, the 6 p.m. bells have gone off during Sunday playoffs in years past, Sister Malachy said.

Kellogg observed that golfers who aren't used to the chimes may be initially startled. But generally speaking, she said, the bells add to the ambience of tournament week.

"I've never heard anyone say 'Oh, those darn bells,'" Kellogg remarked.

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