

FEATURE

Ornament gifts keep on giving — for 20th year

By Jeanne Kidera
Guest contributor

At first, there were only 100 of them. But now, 20 years later, they're coming in droves. This year, the annual Christmas sale of ornaments at St. Louis Church in Pittsford will include 3,000 angels and 2,000 doves.

Marcia Mendola, a St. Louis parishioner and organizer of the ornament sale, started the project 20 years ago, producing only 100 ornaments out of her cousin's home. The idea came to her while working with the parish's hunger task force. The cousin, Jeffrey Nicholson of East Rochester, teaches art in the Rochester city schools.

"I've always been happy that I could feed my own family, and I've always worried about people who couldn't," Mendola said.

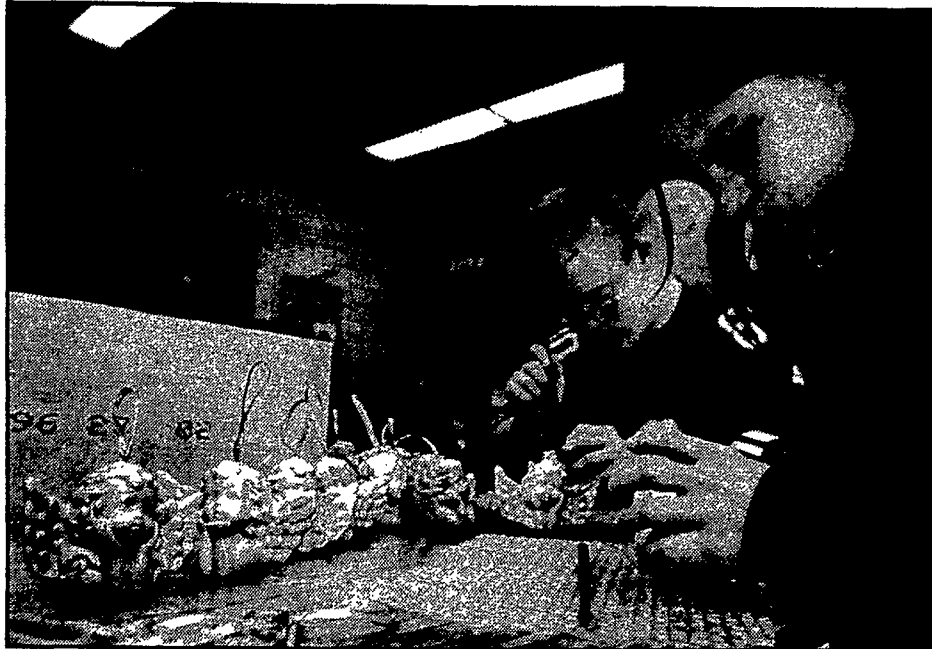
The ornaments are selling this year for \$6 apiece. Two-thirds of the \$4 profit goes to the Little Brothers and Sisters Orphanage and Hospital in Kenscoff, Haiti. One-third of St. Louis' profit goes to the Green Acres food pantry at an inner-city Rochester community center that burned down but is being rebuilt.

Holy Trinity in Webster and Rochester's St. Bridget, St. Philip Neri and St. Andrew parishes began helping St. Louis with the ornament endeavor about four years ago. Two-thirds of the profit also benefits the orphanage in Haiti with one-third assisting local outreach organizations.

Mendola refers to the ornaments as "a gift that gives three times" because not only does it benefit the orphanage and local outreach organizations, but also helps the people who make the ornaments — School of the Holy Childhood and the VA Outpatient Clinic in Rochester. And it helps givers complete their Christmas shopping, she added.

Marianne Maggs, the School of the Holy Childhood's artist-in-residence who runs the school's ceramics program, said "these children with various disabilities can give back," adding that the students, ranging in age from 11-21, understand that they're contributing to the larger process. "It's very exciting for them."

With Maggs and a full-time production aide, Virginia Merring, the students do all of the glazing and painting of the orna-



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Katle Winert, 16, and Adam Wilson, 15, put ribbons on finished angel ornaments at the School of the Holy Childhood in Rochester Oct. 26.



Chrissy Vocco, 19, paints a glaze on an angel ornament at the School of the Holy Childhood.

ments in a ceramics class as part of their vocational training. "It's a job and production," Maggs said. This year the older students, aged 19-21, packaged the ornaments for the first time.

"It takes all year," Maggs said, explaining that she started the year's ornament production in January. "They (the students) always remember St. Louis because there are so many ornaments."

So many, that Mendola had to call the veterans' clinic for help last year.

Cheryl Cotton, a mental health associate at the clinic, said veterans, both male and female, ranging in age from their 20s to their 80s, made 1,500 of the doves this

year as a part of therapeutic day treatment. St. Louis paid the School of the Holy Childhood and the veterans' outpatient clinic \$1.50 for each ornament, and paid 50 cents each for packaging material.

"The cost is simply to cover the supplies," Maggs said, adding that the school itself does not sell the specific angels and doves. "We can sell them the next year, but then they're special editions," she said.

This is because the angels are different every year, and there haven't always been doves. This year the angels are a royal Danish color, a light or pastel blue. Mendola described this year's angel as a Raphael-type angel, a face and wings, which comes in a metallic bag. Instead of the normal gift bag for the doves, they come in a gold gift box this year.

The ornaments are available at the participating churches, several shops in Pittsford, and shops in outlying areas including Hurd Orchard in Holley and Rockcastle Florist in Canandaigua and Greece. A full list of sites is available at www.greenac.org, under "update"; for further information Mendola may be reached at 716-586-3771.

Kidera interned with the Catholic Courier this past summer.

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