

HEALTHY RETIREMENT

Woman's St. Joseph's Tables would floor you

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

EAST ROCHESTER — Passers-by who see the bevy of American flags in Inez Ledonne's front yard and trees may wonder what could possibly lurk inside her Garfield Street house.

The flags are, indeed, just a warm-up to a spectacular interior display created by Ledonne. Numerous plants hang from the kitchen ceiling. Her refrigerator is covered by nearly 400 magnets. Photographs fill the walls in the kitchen, dining area and living room. Glass cabinets brim with literally hundreds of cappuccino and espresso cups. And strings of lights help illuminate all the decorations.

Ledonne, 78, cheerfully acknowledges visitors' observations that she doesn't leave an inch of bare space on the wall, and that being in her house is like being in a museum.

Despite the wealth of festive items packing her modestly sized house, enough space was left over to have annually accommodated one of the biggest St. Joseph's Tables in town.

"You'd come in the back door, fill up your plate and go out the front. This house has had a lot of people in it," said Ledonne, a parishioner at St. Jerome's Church.

Ledonne began her St. Joseph's Tables in 1971 and continued the tradition nearly every year into the late 1990s. With guests totaling nearly 200 at times, Ledonne would often present a table over a few days' stretch around the Feast of St. Joseph on March 19.

All those people flocked to her home by word of mouth, she added: "The Italian people, you do not send invitations."

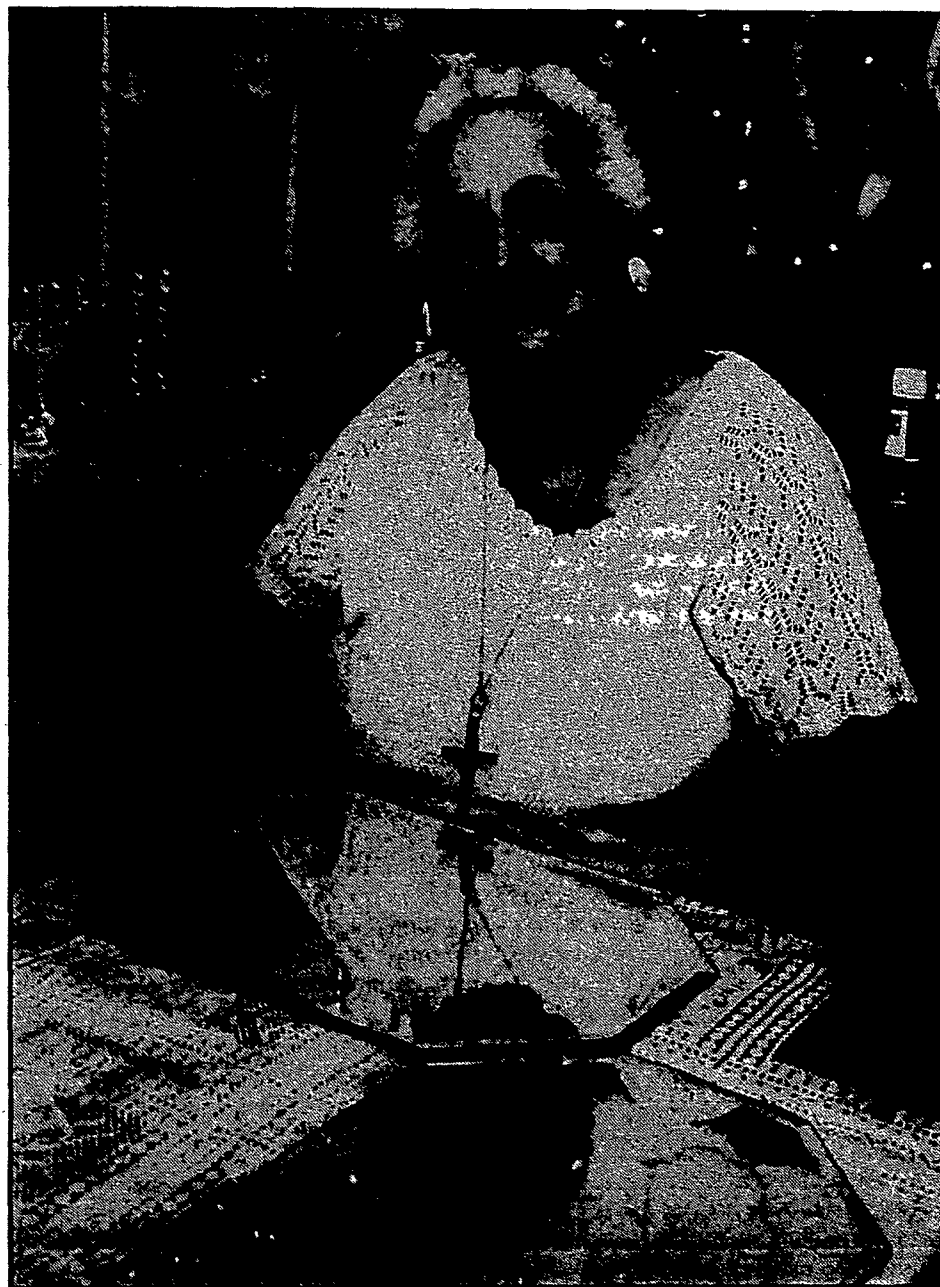
To make sure there was enough food to go around, Ledonne toiled in her cellar for several months in advance, preparing enough dishes to fill four tiers mounted on a large table. Notes from a past St. Joseph Table reveal this partial list of offerings she made: 200 bread rolls; more than 700 rice balls; and four Jell-O casseroles. All told, she used 350 pounds of flour and 50 dozen eggs. And a 1979 newspaper article notes that Ledonne's daughter Anne Marie, now 34, rolled all of the nearly 700 meatballs that year.

"I had six freezers loaned to me. I had to write down which freezer I had which (items) in," Ledonne said, laughing. She also noted that some have joked "that if they had a famine in East Rochester, Inez would feed the whole town."

Although Ledonne got help from family and friends, presenting these St. Joseph's Tables were largely a one-person operation. Ledonne willingly shouldered the cost, saying she kept expenses down by buying in large quantities.

"I just loved to do it. If you didn't love to do it, forget about it," she remarked.

In addition to her hospitality toward



James Stein/Photo Intern

Inez Ledonne is an expert on the preparation of St. Joseph's Tables, having fed hundreds in her East Rochester home from 1971 through 1998.

whoever stopped by, Ledonne would make sure leftovers went to charities for the poor. "You do for people. God makes it go back; somehow it comes back," she said.

Leg trouble has cut down Ledonne's mobility in recent years, and since 1998 she has only held low-key St. Joseph's Tables.

But she still plans on having some sort of table acknowledging the upcoming St. Joseph's Day.

"I'll do something," she said. "I've gotta do something when that day comes along, because I know somebody's going to come."

St. Joseph's Day, which honors the carpenter husband of the Virgin Mary, is the feast of the simple and poor. St. Joseph is especially beloved among Italians, who hold tables not only to honor him, but also in thanksgiving for favors received.



Courtesy of Inez Ledonne

This photo from March 24, 1998, shows the scale of the St. Joseph's Tables Ledonne used to present in her home.

from the church, speaks fondly of the many priests who have come to bless the tables. She also keeps photo albums along with guest registries and other items related to the St. Joseph's Tables, including one fan letter that states "How you do it boggles the mind."

Though Ledonne no longer holds the tables on a large scale, she's happy to pass her knowledge on to those interested in creating their own St. Joseph's Tables. For instance, she makes available copies of a list of St. Joseph's Table "musts" that remind the preparer to cut food into small portions; to limit guests to one plate; and to disallow doggie bags.

Another list suggests appropriate food items such as breads in the shapes of crosses and chalices; kuchens; fruit salads; quiches; casseroles; cream puffs; relishes; greens and beans; cakes; and such specialty Italian items as *panettone* (sweet cakes) and *taralli* (bread snacks).

"You've got to have candles and fresh flowers," Ledonne added.

Then again, she said, first-time St. Joseph's Table hosts may opt for simpler approaches.

"One mother said she was going to get some doughnuts and buy some cream puffs and do a table," she recalled.

Ledonne, a lifelong resident of East Rochester and the youngest of eight children, began her own St. Joseph's Tables after a brother survived a serious illness.

All the tables have been held at the Garfield Street home where Ledonne has lived since 1953, the year after she got married. Her husband, Frank, died in 1975.

Ledonne, who lives next door to the St. Jerome's parish rectory and two doors

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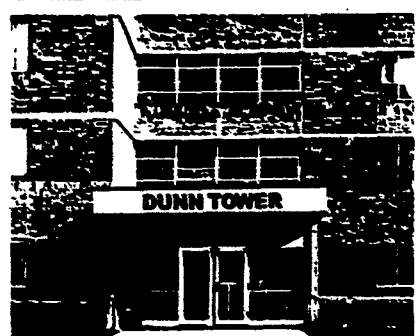
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