

New St. Bernard's opens its doors

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

PITTSFORD — As hoopla surrounding the PGA golf championship and Buffalo Bills training camp swirled about them, folks at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry were celebrating their own big event.

And there's one big difference among the three: By summer's end, the golf tournament and football camp will have departed from Pittsford, whereas St. Bernard's is settling in for good.

"We're here for the long haul," stated Sister of St. Joseph Patricia Schoelles, St. Bernard's president.

On Aug. 4, a new era began for St. Bernard's when it officially moved to its brand-new home at 120 French Road. The 17,000-square-foot, single-story building is located adjacent to the new Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, which opened in January of this year.

Construction on St. Bernard's is all but complete, and classes will begin Sept. 3 as planned. The move to French Road marks the first time St. Bernard's has had its own facility. For the previous 22 years, the graduate lay institute rented space at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester.

Two Rochester-area firms — architect Harrison Bridges Associates and general contractor Whitney East — coordinated the building project. Highlights include five classrooms; 15 offices; a chapel and prayer garden; conference room; and library. State-of-the-art equipment runs throughout the building, allowing for such opportunities as video conferences and improved computer access. To honor the past, several statues and other religious items — including some that were part of the former St. Bernard's Seminary on Lake Avenue — are being donated to St. Bernard's and refurbished.

Sister Schoelles said the structure will accommodate 120 students in St. Bernard's graduate program and 200 to 300 per semester in its ministry-certification program during the 2003-04 school year. St. Bernard's also offers extension programs in Albany, Horseheads and Bath.

According to Sister Schoelles, fi-



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

A mover leaves the new St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry building in Pittsford Aug. 4 to bring in more boxes as employees move into their new facility on French Road.

nal cost of the new school was \$3 million, with \$2.5 million derived from the Diocese of Rochester's Partners in Faith capital campaign, which is still under way, and the remainder coming from fundraising efforts by the school.

The building's opening marks the culmination of an initiative that began seven years ago, when St. Bernard's board of directors voted to create its own facility due to an increase among adult Catholics seeking education in church ministry. Land was purchased from the Sisters of St. Joseph in 2000 and construction began in September 2002.

Sister Schoelles noted that buildings such as the new St. Bernard's are rare for lay religious institutes, saying the dream has become a reality due to "bold measures the board took, and the confidence they and the diocese have in our mission." St. Bernard's is private but maintains a close working relationship with the Diocese of Rochester, with Bishop Matthew H. Clark serving as chancellor.

Sister Schoelles said an increasing number of Catholics are seeking education in lay ministry for two primary reasons. The first is necessity, driven by the ongoing priest shortage. The second reason, she explained, is "the theology of Vatican II that says baptism is a sacrament of ministry. As that understanding

Education

ology program was discontinued in 1981, a strong lay-education program had begun at St. Bernard's. The lay program moved to Colgate Rochester upon the seminary's closing that year, and became known as St. Bernard's Institute. In 2002 the school changed its name to St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.

Sister Schoelles said a strong cooperative relationship with Colgate remains, noting that students at both St. Bernard's and Colgate will continue to be allowed to take classes at the other school as part of their curriculum.

"Their hospitality was wonderful," Sister Schoelles said of the Colgate administration. "They provided us with a home ... and without their generosity, we could not have survived."

EDITOR'S NOTE: For additional information about St. Bernard's, call 585/271-3657, or visit www.st-bernards.edu.

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