

# Family past told in glass

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — When the sun shines through Sacred Heart Cathedral's stained-glass windows, it illuminates the story of Valerie O'Hara's family.

O'Hara is owner and director of Pike Stained Glass Studios, which is restoring seven stained-glass windows from the cathedral during its renovation. O'Hara noted that her great uncle, William, started the company in this city in 1908, and the studio created the windows for the diocese's mother church. O'Hara bought the studio from her father, James O'Hara, Pike's nephew, and has run it since 1987.

Pike Studios has also created stained-glass windows for numerous diocesan churches, including St. John the Evangelist, Corpus Christi, Blessed Sacrament and St. Augustine in Rochester. The studio's work can also be seen at St. Louis Church in Pittsford, St. Joseph's Church in Penfield and St. Thomas More Church in Brighton. O'Hara's family has had a hand in stained-glass windows in numerous Protestant churches as well, and she said she enjoys working with sacred art.

"It's very inspirational working with clergy," she said. "It's a beautiful marriage of art and commerce where you can actually make a living creating and making and doing the art that you love."

During an interview in her studio, where she and her staff were working on refurbishing the cathedral's windows, O'Hara pointed out that restoring the windows is an arduous process. Each window must be removed and disassembled, she said, noting that each of the cathedral's large nave windows alone contains 6,000 pieces.

"It's sort of like a big jigsaw puzzle," she said of the window. "When it's completely taken apart, we re-assemble it."

Disassembling involves separating the lead from the glass piece by piece, cleaning the stained glass then re-assembling it. Every lead joint is then resoldered on both sides.

Each window's deterioration level varies, she said.

"It depends how much heat from the sun they're exposed to, which makes the glass expand, which makes the lead expand," she said. "The glass can contract again, but the lead can't. That's what causes the bulging (of the lead) because the lead has nowhere to go but out."

Stained-glass windows are extremely low-maintenance, she said, noting that they must be restored about every 100 years to maintain their structural integrity. In fact, vandalism, not weather, is usually a stained-glass window's greatest enemy, she noted.

O'Hara added that her studio is "faithfully restoring the (cathedral's) windows to their original condition. We're using all the same glass, but it's just new lead. We are preserving the originals by restoring them."

She added that she believes diocesan Catholics will be happy with the results of her staff's work.

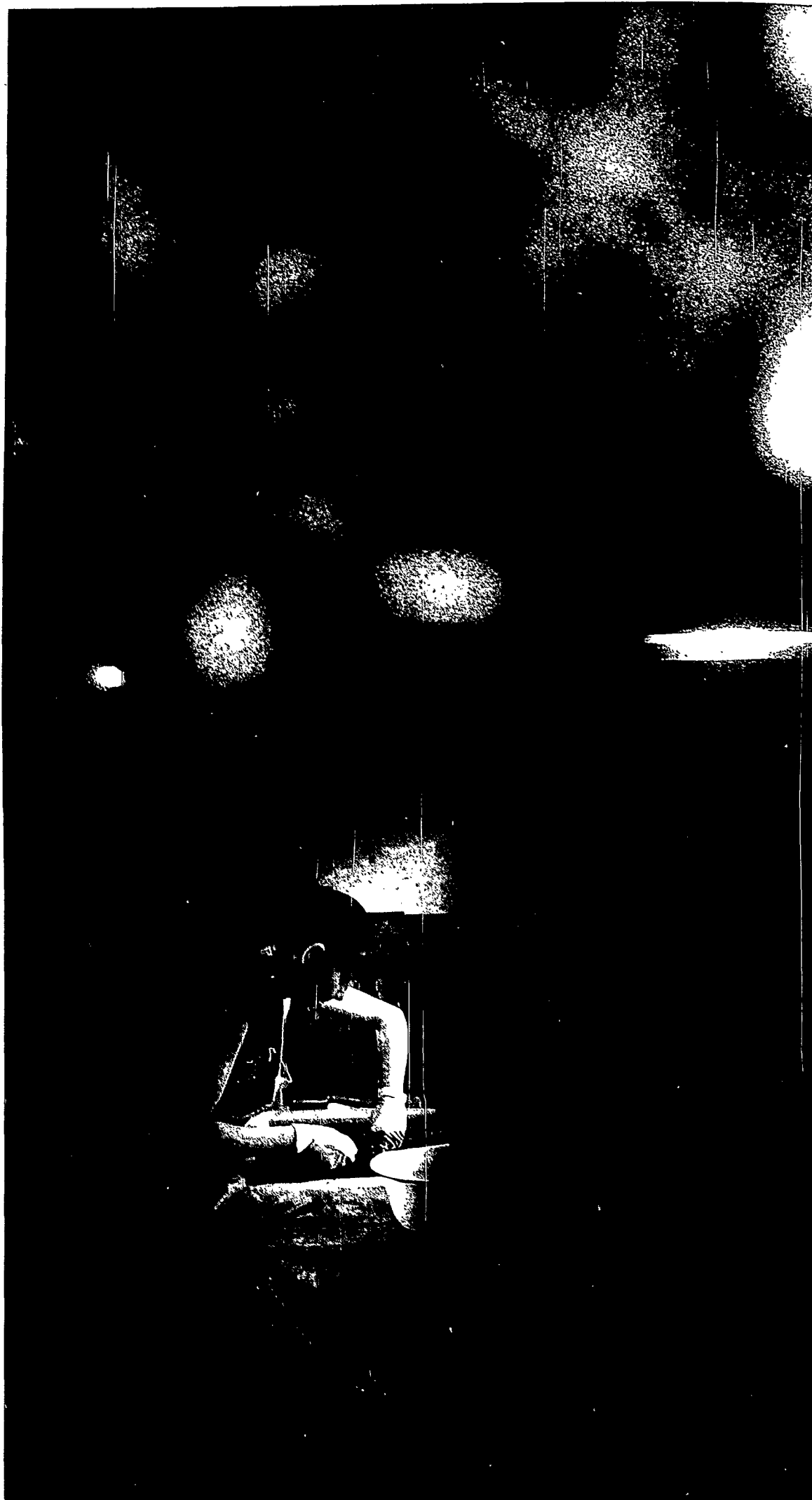
"These are going to be so clean," she said.

She noted that she and her staff have enjoyed working on an effort to make the cathedral look new again.

"Being a part of a large architectural project is nice, and, of course, it's going to last forever," she said.



First in a series  
**Cathedral Renaissance**



Amanda Zielinski, who works for Pike Stained Glass Studios in Rochester, carefully removes the lead from a Sacred Heart Cathedral window as she prepares it to be re-leaded and cleaned.