

FLEA MARKETS A 43 YEAR TRADITION IN HACKENSACK

Flea markets the second Wednesday of each summer month have become a 43-year tradition for Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Hackensack.

Though sponsoring these events takes a massive volunteer effort from church members, "It's the easiest way we ever made money in the church," said Bea Rottier-Davis, who joined the congregation in 1940.

That year, there were three small wood frame churches along Highway 371, she recalled. The Catholic Church was where Hackensack Lumber and Hardware used to be. Across the street was St. Paul's Lutheran Church. A half block south was Union Congregational.

Sacred Heart Altar Society ladies used to hold bake sales every Sunday, Davis recalled. In the fall, they sponsored a roast beef hunters' dinner. In the summer, it was a chicken dinner.

Members donated all the food. If they raised \$300.00 Davis, said, it was considered an extremely successful event.

Preparing and serving those dinners was no easy task, she said. The ladies used the Legion for these events, cooking on kerosene stoves and hauling coffee water from Birch Lake, a block away.

There were 20 registered families at Sacred Heart when Davis joined the parish in 1940. (Today, there are approximately 180 registered families).

By the mid-1950's, she said growing attendance of summer families meant members had to install a loud speaker and place wood planks on cement blocks outside the church to accommodate the swelling summer congregation.

The parish asked the bishop to permit it to build a larger building. His answer was the enrolled membership did not merit a larger church, Davis said.

However, he gave one condition. If the congregation could raise \$25,000, it could build a new church. It took three years, she said.

The present church building was dedicated in 1959. In 1997 the parish completed an addition. Support from summer families has helped immensely, she said.

Charles Wagner, an antique dealer who lived on Woman Lake, brought home the answer to Sacred Heart's fund-raising problems when he suggested 43 years ago that a flea market be tried.

David said the first event drew 10 sellers. They charged \$5 per stall. Today, the fee has only increased to \$15.00 per stall.

The current 160 stalls fill well in advance. Vendors now fill the large church parking lot and lawns with their wares.

Audrey Mergens, supported by a large group of ladies and some men, is in charge of the food sold and consumed in the social hall of the church. People in the parish provide rolls, bars, cakes and homemade pies to be sold at modest prices. In addition, some 90 to 100 lbs. of ground beef is prepared the day before each flea market day for sloppy joes and 300 wieners are purchased for hot dogs. The rolls for these sandwiches are purchased at the Hackensack Bakery. Some ladies prepare a

sour kraut salad for use with their sandwiches for those who prefer it. Coffee, tea, lemonade and water are available.

Though the event is scheduled to begin at 6:30 a.m., she said people begin going through the buffet line at 6:00 a.m. for the homemade rolls and donuts. They serve until after 3:00 p.m.

Flea market day coordinates with Hackensack Sweetheart Days in July. In August, the church lunch features home-made pies.

Unlike many congregations, Sacred Heart kept its little old church when it moved into the new one. The congregation moved the old church to a site on the far side of the parking lot. Davis recalls frying donuts in the old church for bake sales and church lunches.

Today the old church houses an on-going rummage sale through summer weekends, with peak sales on flea market days.

Betty Gleisner, who became the Catholic Council of Women rummage sale chair in 1991 said sales have grown substantially from the approximate \$2,000 she took in then. Her staff of volunteers would sort the clothing and other items to stock the racks for sale.

In recent years, the little church has been re-roofed, painted and gained some new windows. The rummage sale is currently headed up by Adie Gilmer who says she cannot give enough credit to the good volunteer help that keeps things running, not to mention the generosity of people who continue to donate good reusable items and the wonderful following of on-going customers who come from far and wide.

Others have graciously stepped up to take on leadership roles when it has become necessary, as well.

Bill Riegert took on the role of reservation coordinator in 1997 following the death of Margaret Jensen who handled it for many years. Bill made a few changes and continued to run a tight ship, maintaining close to a 100% prepaid occupancy for the spaces. A team of workers continue to assist on flea market days in getting vendors to their spaces and in the parking of shoppers. Mark's Market has been kind enough to provide parking space behind the store for the events. In May a mailing is done to the potential vendors reminding them of the dates of the upcoming flea markets and asking for their space fees. Bill says that he found the system to be quite effective.

Ed Mergens, who had been involved in just about all aspects of the annual flea markets since he and his wife Audrey retired to the Hackensack area in 1990, began to work hand-in-hand with Bill Riegert in 2005 in order to share some of the responsibility of reservations coordinator. After a couple of years Bill handed over the reins to Ed and Ed did a most superb job of taking care of correspondence to the vendors, record keeping, and all of the details of space marking and checking in of the vendors as Bill had. Ed had everything in order for the season's flea markets when he passed away on May 31st of 2009. The flea markets at Sacred Heart Church last year held special significance as Ed's smiling face and spirit of comradery was so missed.

Bill Riegert took on the leadership of the vendor activity, then, and Bill made sure everyone knew that someone else would be needed to take things over.

Now, in the year of 2010, in the spirit that was instilled by those hard working and generous early parishioners, two couples have come forward to take on the task of flea market coordinating . They are Shirley and Mike Motschenbacher and Karen and Will Peternell.

The Council of Catholic Women is most grateful to these couples and to the many volunteers that keep this famously fun, summer highlight going. In that vein, the Council and the Parish of Sacred Heart thanks all who have worked to make this yearly event a success and those who have supported us through the years.

**Originally written by Monica Lundquist,
Cass County Correspondent, and published
In the Brainerd Daily Dispatch on
Wednesday, July 1, 1998.
Used and adapted by permission.
Updated by Walt Kane in 2004 and
Joanne Johnson in 2010.**

Used with permission

Copyright © 2009 stagnescatholic.com All Rights Reserved