



Neighbors: St. Gerard Campus helps women

Natalie and Tommy Lucas

Downtown News

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What is it about St. Augustine that draws so many interesting and good people? The old families have great stories to tell. Newcomers arrive bringing their unique talents, values and dreams. Caroline and Al Wolff moved to St. Augustine to retire 28 years ago after a lifetime of service and sacrifice. They had raised five children. They had opened their home to at least 40 other teenagers 'in trouble;' they organized community service, opened a soup kitchen, served as lay missionaries, helped rescue the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Pennsylvania, taught school, coached basketball and more. They were ready to retire. But, Caroline said, "God had other plans."

Caroline was happily working at Leonard Photography Studio when another employee told her of a battered young woman.

"I went to the house because nobody else was helping her. And then, when I went, I found the young girl, a young mother with a baby in her arms, she told me she thought he loved her. She said her mother threw her out when she was pregnant. I asked her if she wanted to come with me. She refused. I gave her my phone number. She called me from the hospital. The baby had a broken jaw. Dad had taken a wide swing and broke the jaw."

Caroline took her out of the home and found a family who would take her in. They did. They had other children in their family but were glad to help.

"I started looking for other resources here. Nothing. No hotline for battered children. No resources whatsoever. Then I went to Catholic Charities and got all their maternity cases. I went out to see the mothers to help them.

All that was many years ago. And now we work with about a thousand women a year," she said.

Through the years Caroline and Al have established the St. Gerard Campus, U.S. 1 South. It is a thriving maternity home for pregnant and unwed mothers, most of whom are teenagers.

"God is amazing," Caroline announces to visitors to the campus. "Truly, what he can accomplish through one person who is willing to stand and pray in hope is marvelous."

Caroline is devoted to Our Lady and the rosary. "My rock foundation is prayer," she said. "Prayer gets the young women through their hard times, too. Prayer helps them with complicated questions concerning marriage and family and the difficult days at the end of each school year, when questions about the future loom large. A small peaceful chapel at St. Gerard House offers a quiet retreat from classroom, squalling infants and the doorbell that rings 40 or more times a day, announcing the arrival of yet another young woman who needs help."

Caroline says: "The instances of healing, restoration, renewal and achievement are too numerous to share. Someday, I'll write a book. But I don't have time now."

We see Caroline and Al coming and going as they continue to promote respect for life with deep determination and love. They have put their lives on the line to help young women in crisis. They have received numerous awards and much has been written about them. Call 929-5516 to find out information.

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Leslie V. Goode, senior library assistant, and librarian Linda Sorenson with the Bookmobile Extension Services for St. Johns County Public Library System, asked us the help "spread the word about our stops so that we can reach as many people as possible." Betty Frederick is the Bookmobile extension services manager. These are the dates and times for the downtown Bookmobile service:

- The Oaks Apartments: 11 a.m. to noon, Nov. 4, 18 and Dec. 2 and 16.
- Excelsior: 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. Nov. 4, 18, Dec. 2, 16.
- Buckingham Smith: 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Oct. 30, Nov. 13, Dec. 11.
- Galimore Center: 3:45 to 4:45 p.m. Oct. 30, Nov. 13, Dec. 11.

For information, call the library at 827-6944 or e-mail lgoode@sjcfl.us.

Bishop Robert Baker of the Diocese of Birmingham, Ala., will be in town next Saturday and Sunday to celebrate the Festival of Life. When Bishop Bob was stationed at the Cathedral, he started the Our Lady of Hope Community.

It helps young men and women struggling with addiction. The Festival of Life will be held at Our Lady of Hope Community, 5985 State Road 16, 6 1/2 miles west of Interstate 95.

The festival begins at 7:30 p.m. Saturday with a Biblical drama, "Rejoice in Hope." There is no charge for this event.

Sunday's activities will begin at 11 a.m. with Mother Elvira Petrozzi, founder of the Comunita Cenacola. The day will conclude with Holy Mass celebrated by Bishop Victor Galeone, Bishop Robert Baker and retired Bishop John Snyder.

Carol Lopez-Bradshaw of the Menorcan Cultural Society reminds everyone of the Nov. 8 gathering at Tolomato Cemetery. A Mass will be said in the Tolomato Cemetery at 10

a.m. for all who are laid to rest there. Lunch will be on your own. We will gather at 1 p.m. at one of the Menorcan houses on St. George Street to share family history, stories and pictures. Bring your family roots and share. For more information call Carol at 826-3388.

Jim Fitzpatrick sends word from the Knights of Columbus Council 611 of another enjoyable social event. "Nite at the Races" will be Nov. 7 at the Bishop Baker Hall on S. St. George Street. Festivities begin at 6 p.m. with a deli supper. Admission is \$8 per person. Proceeds to support Cathedral Parish School. For tickets contact Jim Fitzpatrick 460-9437.

Please stay in touch with us at 824-4180.

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