

# SEASONED OBSERVER

## Building Bridges of Faith

BY AMANDA HUDSON  
News editor

Not everything tackled by members of a Rockford men's group has been as much fun as this fall's project.

On a crisp, overcast, mid-November Saturday, they were racing around on all-terrain vehicles, piloting Bobcats, tractors and golf carts and hiking through the woods at

Bishop Lane Retreat Center. The work that day was spreading wood chips on a walking path that they were completing.

Earlier this fall, member Tom Graceffa of St. Anthony of Padua Parish mapped out the trail with guidance from groundskeeper Doug McNames. The new trail begins near the youth building, goes behind the original retreat center buildings, curving into the woods to the north and over the creek through the woods to the east — 1.1 miles in all.



The trail project was anticipated to be five to six days of work, Graceffa says, explaining the details for this final day. "Each trailer holds about 10 feet of mulch," he explains, "so we have to make about 550 trips."

He shows off a bridge farther up the creek that the men's group also built. The bridge's deck, he explains, was built in sections and anchored to the existing concrete dam all designed and constructed with flooding in mind. Graceffa notes that the men in the group are "all guys familiar with the trades," such as electric, plumbing and tile trades, and adds, "These guys don't get dirty for a living, (so they) enjoy (these) projects."

The bridge was, he concludes, "half clever and half hard work."

The group began when a few Holy Family parishioners were around in 2003 to travel to Haiti for construction projects at the Lourverture Cleary School. After six years of Haiti work, the men decided to address some needs in the Rockford area. In those two years, they have remodeled parish classrooms at SS. Peter and Paul Parish, remodeled the convent-turned-seminarian-house chapel at the Cathedral of St. Peter, and, now, completed the trail and bridge at Bishop Lane Retreat Center.

St. Rita parishioner Dale Dickinson says he was drawn to the group because of what they were doing in Haiti even though he couldn't travel because of his schedule. "But I would take a van loaded with tools and supplies and get them to the airport and back," he says, adding that it is "a good group of men from very different backgrounds. Many are owners or managers of companies, executives who are usually found behind a desk.

"There are engineers, a landscape architect, remodeler-type people, those good with tools. Here, they are in a whole different light. They are workers like everyone else. There are no titles; they are all working for the same cause.

"We do what is required and requested" by the organization being served, he says. "What we might consider important might not be high on their list. We have to keep in mind what they are looking for (and) if it matches what we do ... we don't want to take on a project that we are not suited for.

"All the causes have been good causes. (This group) enriches me spiritually as well as physically."

A few years ago, Dickinson began to help with the administration of the group, including record-keeping of contributions and follow-up thank you letters. The men do their own fundraising as well as the physical labor, he says.

The group's unofficial leader is the guy who is happily manning the Bobcat this Saturday — Holy Family parishioner Bill Derry, who has been with the group since its second trip to

## Men's Group Aims for Hands-on Work, Fellowship and Spiritual Growth



Joe Altenhoff watches as Bill Derry dumps a load of mulch onto his trailer, assisted by Jerry Korchak. Volunteers spread about 500 cubic yards of wood chips along a trail at Bishop Lane Retreat Center.



Tom Graceffa points to a detail on the map of the new trail at Bishop Lane Retreat Center. Men from several Rockford-area parishes came together to clear and build the trail this past fall.



Members of the men's group enlisted the help of relatives and friends to complete a 1.1-mile trail at Bishop Lane Retreat Center. Working on the project were (back from left) Mike Arduino, two grandsons of Dan Snider, Chris Graceffa, Jerry Korchak, Tom Kolhorst, Dale Dickinson, Bob Pfundstein, Dave Leezer, Bill Derry (front) Dan Snider, Joe Altenhoff holding St Joseph statue (see below), Pat Derry and Tom Graceffa. Others who worked on the path were Darren Kimerly, Ed Koscak, Jim Derry, Kevin Knabe, Mike Derry, Doug McNames, Paul Nickel and Leo Linden.

Haiti. The Haiti trips offered something that was nearly lost when the group switched to local projects, he says.

"In Haiti, we'd work hard all day and in the evenings we had time for reflection and spiritual development," Derry says. "It was like a retreat in the evening, and we talked about the challenges and our experiences of faith. (Here) we'd go home after our day of hard work.

"At our first two work days at the retreat house project, most of us stayed overnight. We ate together and spent a couple of hours of spiritual reflection. We plan to continue to find ways to make (spiritual growth) a part of (our projects)."



To that end, a committee is working to come up with a new name for the group and design a mission statement to give members and donors a clear understanding of the group, its purpose and projects.

"We're going to keep the mission statement broad and general," Derry says, "but (it will) talk about the kind of work we want to do" for non-profit, Catholic and other Christian organizations.

As that mission comes into focus, the men hope to expand their membership to other parishes.

For more information, email Bill Derry at billd@field-fastener.com or call him at 815/494-5826.

## DESTINATION



(CNS photo/Nancy Wleche)

## Pope John Paul II Cultural Center

Washington, D.C.

**Destination:** Catholics from around the country and the world can learn about the heritage left us by Blessed John Paul II at the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center. The Knights of Columbus announced that they would purchase the center during their annual meeting last August. Plan your visit during the week, though, because the center is only open Tuesday and Thursday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tours can be arranged for other weekdays. (See contact information, below.)

Masses are held Tuesday and Thursday at 11:30 a.m.

**Why to go:** The center sits on 12 acres in a part of the Washington, D.C., known as "Little Rome" or "Little Vatican." Other Catholic institutions of note in the area



(CNS photo by Michael Hoyt)

are the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and The Catholic University of America, the headquarters of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, Trinity University, Providence Hospital and the Franciscan Monastery and Commissariat of the Holy Land.

The center cost \$75 million to build and the property has been valued at \$37.7 million. It opened in 2001 with financial backing from the Detroit Archdiocese.

A Papal and Polish Heritage room features photos, videos, artwork and memorabilia from Blessed John Paul's life, from his childhood through his papacy. Other displays include gifts from world dignitaries, vessels from Masses celebrated by Blessed John Paul II and other reminders of his lifetime.

The Knights plan a variety of exhibits for the center, including displays on the life and legacy of Blessed John Paul and on the Catholic heritage of North America.

**Access:** Navigating the grounds should not be a problem.

**(Grand) Kid friendly:** Children of all ages will enjoy a visit to the center.

**Info:** Address: Pope John Paul II Cultural Foundation, Inc., P.O. Box 4471, Phone: 202/635-5400. Web: www.jp2cf.org.

— Compiled by Sharon Boehlefeld; CNS contributed to the story

Send your Destination ideas to [SeasonedObserver@rockforddiocese.org](mailto:SeasonedObserver@rockforddiocese.org)



(CNS photo/Bob Roller)

## Shrine interior