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New Neighbors Arrive in Canyon

By Cathy Dausman

The newest neighbors in Canyon are intent on living a quiet life. Guests of the McCosker ranch, they are vegetarians who make their bedding from handmade straw and ticking, wear simple garb and sandals, and rely on donations to meet their everyday needs. They don't teach, or nurse or work with the poor. Instead they hope to help everyone through a life of contemplation and prayer.

Lamorinda's newest neighbors are Sisters of the Carmel of Jesus, Mary and Joseph of Canyon, relocating from Valparaiso, Nebraska to accommodate their expanding population.

By their own rules, a Carmelite community may not number more than 21 members. The Nebraska population had swelled to 37. "We love it here," said Mother Agnes, of their new surrounds. "Right now it's just the 'shock troops,'" she said, with a smile in her voice and sounding decidedly secular. The first group of five sisters, ranging in age from 27 to 72, arrived in late July. A second group of younger sisters, all in their late-teens to mid-20s, are scheduled to arrive late September.

The establishment of the new temporary monastery falls on the 450th anniversary of the order's formation in the 16th century. The order has ties to the San Francisco area dating back to Spanish occupation. Eventually a permanent monastery will be built within the Diocese of Oakland, which extends from Fremont to Vallejo and east to Livermore.

As new neighbors, the sisters have registered for a post office box, and are encountering wildlife in Canyon, including a mountain lion sighted on their grounds.

"Everybody's been so welcoming," Mother Agnes said. Although she politely declined to have the sisters faces photographed or even named, she said members come from as far away as Seattle and Australia.

Outsiders may consider cloistered religious to be "tight lipped and frowning." Not so, says Mother Agnes. The sisters are "joyful and full of life...a reminder God is there for them, and hope for our sometimes poor, sad world." Reflecting on her own 36 years of cloistered life, she said simply, "It's a wonderful life."

Back to School, Saint Mary's College Style

By Cathy Dausman



Cars line up in front of Augustine Hall to unload freshmen and possessions
 Photo Cathy Dausman

Welcome, class of 2016. This was not your typical college experience. Many of the approximately 600 freshmen checking into Saint Mary's College residence halls were met by upperclass student volunteers and treated to valet move-in service from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. last Thursday, August 23.

"Welcome to Saint Mary's," the group cheered before they descended on the next car in line, unloading an entire dorm room full of possessions in mere minutes.

Senior Molly Allen was ground-traffic controller. Stop the car. Pop the trunk. Unload belongings into the arms of waiting Resident Assistants, Mission and Ministry or Week of Welcome volunteers. Tag the belongings with room number. Dispatch the belongings.

"Once we got the routine down it went pretty smoothly," she said. Those working the Augustine move-in felt lucky; only it and the Aquinas residences have elevators. Behind Allen, Brother Dominic Berardelli worked the line of cars, introducing himself and chatting with incoming freshmen. He met parents sending their only child to college, as well as those with both college age and kindergarten age students. "This is my favorite day of the year," he said. Returning students said everyone gets to meet "Brother Dom" on the first day.

Students came from across the globe. "Our new international freshmen are citizens of Australia, Austria,

Canada, China, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden, Taiwan, the U.K. and Japan," said Michael McAlpin, Director of Media Relations. "We're also seeing more enrollments of students from Hawaii and more from the Pacific Northwest."

Of the 2,800 Saint Mary's students, only freshmen and sophomores were guaranteed on-campus housing. Freshmen generally live in the central campus area. Sophomores live in "the Canyon Area," which includes several suite-style residence halls located at the back of the campus. Juniors and seniors populate unfilled residence space by participating in a housing lottery.

Lamorindans in nearby apartment complexes like those on Ascot Drive, in Miramonte Gardens or at Park Lafayette noticed a surge in residents as students sought off campus housing, but they were not the only ones who detected a shift in the town's dynamic.

When asked if he knew it was back to school time for the college, Moraga Police Chief Robert Priebe remarked, "Clearly, we do." Priebe explained that is mostly because it is back-to-school time for nearly everyone else as well, and is always accompanied by a notable drop in vacation watch requests. Saint Mary's is "very proactive" when it comes to safety issues, said Priebe, although until new students get the hang of dialing "9" before calling off-campus, there might be a few mistaken 911 calls placed.

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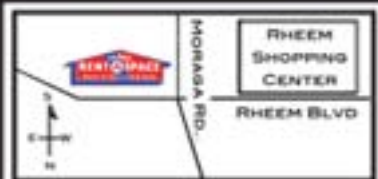


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