

Unity Acres
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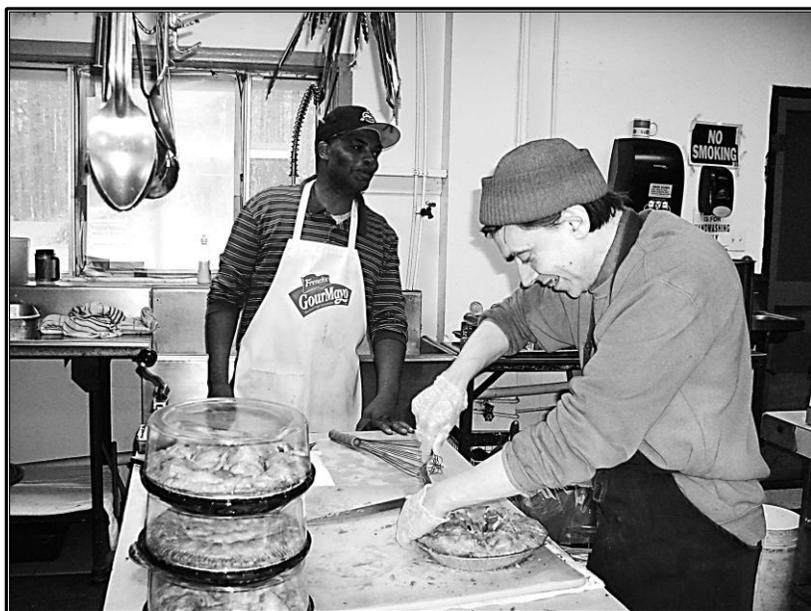
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December 8, 2011

Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

We celebrated the Thanksgiving holiday two weeks ago today in traditional style with a noon meal shared by residents, staff, our friends the Hoyts (from Saint Francis Farm) and guests Doug and John. The meal was served at 12:30, after Thanksgiving Day Mass. Father Jones offered the blessing, and then all those assembled shared turkey, potato, stuffing, gravy, etc., etc., and several sorts of pie.

The meal on Thanksgiving was planned and prepared by small team of very dedicated men who run the Unity Acres kitchen, day in and day out, week in and week out, but who really shine on these special occasions. Thank you, Gary and Lou and kitchen workers!



Immediately after Thanksgiving, an artificial tree, lights and holiday ornaments were removed from the little closet dedicated to the purpose of storing seasonal decorations, and these were set up throughout the sitting room and the ground floor of our main building. (Thanks, Elby!) A wreath was fashioned from fresh hemlock branches and was in place in our chapel for Mass on the first Sunday of Advent. Two other pine cone wreaths have been made and are hanging, one from the

“Unity Acres” sign at the front of the property along Route 2, and the other at the front entrance of the main building. (Thanks, Rick!). The dining room in our “Star Building”, too, has been decorated for the celebration of the up-coming holiday. (Thanks, Helen, Marie and Aleata!)

The Altar and Rosary Society of Christ Our Light Parish have organized their annual Christmas party for the Acres for Wednesday, December 14, continuing a tradition of at least 30 years. We’ve also been in touch with Lorraine, the “Glove Lady” of Holland Patent, who for the last ten or so years has been collecting winter gloves and other presents for distribution to our men at Christmas. This year, however, the Glove Lady, will become the “Pillow Lady”, and so through her assistance, and the generosity of Saint Ann’s-Saint Leo’s in Holland Patent, we will

have new clean pillows. John and Don will be meeting Lorraine at SU next week to receive the pillows on behalf of the men of Unity Acres.

As we prepare for our celebration of the Christmas holiday, and the arrival of the New Year shortly thereafter, it's time to offer a brief update of events at the Acres during the past few months.

By late spring, anticipation of our annual picnic, held on the third Sunday of August, becomes a sort of organizational prompt for many of the efforts of the men and the staff at Unity Acres. We adjust the menus, debate the amounts of food to order, ponder over the number of guests we might expect. The vegetable garden is planned with the date of the picnic in mind, so that we should have fresh corn-on-the-cob to offer. We hope that the weather will not be too hot. We *know* that it won't rain.

So it was something more than a shock on the morning of August 21 to wake to the sound of a pounding rain-storm. Despite inclement weather, the kitchen staff with help from Peg, Loretta and Helen made the last-minute adjustments to seat more guests than usual in-doors, with Bear and Charlie arranging overflow seating in the recreation room. Still others helped with preparations to bring the usual 'outdoor' Mass inside. Thanks again, to Rick, for lending his fern collection to decorate the chapel!

The weather improved slightly as the morning wore on, but we were glad in the end to have moved our celebration of the Mass into our Sacred Heart Chapel. Most years, the Mass on Picnic Sunday has been outside, on the lawn immediately in front of the Main Building, with



flowering Rose of Sharon bushes, and the tall Sunflowers as a sort of back-drop. In the further past, our Mass was celebrated a few times behind the North Wing, next to the Stone Chapel, and one memorable year, on the banks of Trout Brook.

This year's unplanned and unanticipated move inside became a happy occasion for visitors and Unity Acres folks to squeeze in together creating a literal closeness and a tangible unity between all, with every

pew filled, and every hastily set folding chair occupied. The Mass crowd extended out of the chapel and spilled out into the hallways and sitting room.

Once again, the spirit of community at Mass was strong; the food delicious. We thank all who attended our Mass and Picnic. We offer sincere appreciation to all who contributed, to all who assisted in whatever way.

Our mailing in October announced a capital improvement plan. We have received kind and thoughtful responses to that appeal. Among our many concerns for the future of Unity Acres has been the structural integrity of the buildings that constitute 'home' for 78 men (that's the number of men who are living here today, December 8), the comfort and safety of the men as they inhabit these ageing buildings, and our ability to continue to meet rising energy costs for heating and lighting.

A group of long-time supporters began meeting several years ago to help insure the on-going ability of our little team to meet the needs of the men for *safe and secure* housing in these buildings. One of the results of these meetings was a comprehensive assessment of the physical plant, which included a number of recommendations and suggestions concerning repairs and replacement of equipment, windows, roofs, and so on.

The buildings themselves for the most part date to the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s. The Star Building was built in 1973 or 1974 to house our kitchen and dining hall. There are a few out-buildings that the men themselves have constructed during the past few years: a tractor barn, a maintenance building, a pig barn.

It was a great relief to receive the opinion that the buildings were in fact generally sound, however several deficiencies were noted which we have been since attempting to address. We have tried to prioritize and carry out the recommendations we received, to the extent of the capabilities of the men in residence here to carry out the needed repairs, and to the extent of the availability of funds to hire contractors, when necessary. There have also been not a few items added to our critical 'to do' list, due to unexpected failures of equipment and systems. (*Details of projects undertaken during 2011 follow on pages 4&5.*)

In the meantime, as daylight grows shorter, and as winter's cold and snow start to set in, we are staying warm and well-fed. We have clothing and food to offer and share with one another. And we are glad that Unity Acres and other places like it exist where the sharing of food and clothing takes place, where hospitality and mutual assistance are enacted, where the stranger is welcomed. Thank you, everyone, whose generosity, whose kindness and prayers, allow this sharing, this hospitality and mutual assistance, and this welcoming, to continue.

We wish you a very blessed Christmas.

Steve Dickhout

MY DAILY PRAYER:

***That we will continue to grow into the people of God that God needs us to be.
To be humble and to love as we are loved by God, and to always hear God's calling.***

To obey without question, to walk without knowing .

To always be true to the gospel, to be led by the truth God has put in my heart.

To be wise but tender, to defend those who can not defend themselves.

To put my life totally in God's hands.

To always hear the needs of others always service before self.

To always help where I can to walk by faith, to comfort, uplift, and pray .

To be slow to anger and quick to forgive.

Robert Koos

Please pray for the happy repose of the souls of BENJAMIN E. AUSTIN and CLAUDE COOK. Ben died most unexpectedly at Unity Acres on July 28th. Ben had been with us at the Acres since March 2009. He had previously lived in Constantia for several years. Ben assisted here at the Acres as one of the night-watchmen, and was faithful in carrying out his duties. He was an affable man, well-liked by all. An investigator from the State Police made contact with Ben's family, and we were pleased to be able to make arrangements for Ben's funeral here at the Acres. Many friends from the Acres, and family members were in attendance at the funeral Mass, and at the graveside at Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery.

Claude died September 4th while visiting family members in Norwich. Claude had been a resident of the Acres beginning in 1994 until moving to the Pontiac Apartments in Oswego in November 2007. While living at the Acres, Claude was one of the cooks in our canteen. After moving to Oswego, Claude would visit the Acres from time to time, occasionally spending a day or two, and baking the most delicious bread! His most recent visit to the Acres was for the funeral of Art Conant, with whom he had worked in the canteen. Claude's funeral was held at the Acres on September 18. His ashes were buried at Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery.

2011 PROJECTS SUMMARY

- *Chimney Repairs*

One of the more alarming problems noted in the property assessment was the deteriorated state of two chimneys. One of these chimneys is connected to the furnace of "B Building", and is above a flat roof. Loose bricks from this chimney could potentially fall, and damage the roof below. This chimney is easily accessed by ladder, and so we were able to arrange the needed repairs some time ago. The chimney for "A Building", similarly deteriorated, however, is above a steeply pitched metal roof, three-and-a-half stories above ground level, and consequently a difficult, potentially dangerous repair to plan and complete. If left unrepaired, the chimney's loose bricks and masonry posed a risk to anyone walking below. Earlier this year, we obtained a bid for this job from a contractor, and shortly thereafter a phone call from the United Methodist Church in Mexico enquiring whether there were any particular needs we were facing? A check for 50% of our expected costs was delivered by members of the church's outreach committee, which enabled us to accept our contractor's bid. The chimney has since been repaired.

- *Energy Efficiency Update*

In November 2010, we signed an agreement with a contractor to replace over 200 T-12 fluorescent lights with T-8 light bulbs and to retrofit all fluorescent light fixtures for the new bulbs. The T-8s are more energy-efficient and give better light. The actual change-over from the old T-12s to the new T-8s was done over the course of several days in January and February of this year, with Bear Foote assisting the contractor. As we move ahead with making the Acres a little 'greener', we should also recover our expenses over time for this project by an estimated annual reduction of 21,000 kWh in our use of electricity.

- *Windows*

We have continued with the replacement of older windows with newer more energy efficient windows in "B Building." The final element to the renovation of our Sacred Heart Chapel, which was mostly complete in 2010, was the replacement of the chapel's six windows in September. A further eight windows on the ground floor of "B Building" were replaced in September and in November.

- *Furnaces*

Just a few days after firing up the furnaces for this winter's heating season, we found we had to shut down the boiler that heats the "Star Building." This boiler dates back to the 1970s when the Star Building was originally constructed to house the Acres' Dining Hall. This building had been heated by an outdoor wood boiler that was put into service in late 2006, but which is currently not functional. The old boiler had begun leaking water in the fire box, was not repairable, and needed to be replaced. The heating contractor came and left us an estimate, which we accepted, and completed installation of the new boiler early the following week. During the interim, a bequest which we have been expecting since January arrived in the mail which represented 80% of the cost of the new boiler. The following day we received a gift from one of our regular donors in Oswego covering the remaining balance.

- *Exterior Lighting*

On November 21 this year, the Orwell Fire Department made a site visit to the Acres to help us make a safety assessment of the buildings and grounds. One of their major recommendations to us was to improve outdoor lighting, particularly at the entrances to the buildings. The streetlight-type lamps on poles on the grounds by the "Star Building" and at the foot of the ramp to the "Annex", and another similar light attached under the eaves of the second floor of the "Infirmary", have been out-of-order for a number of years. The entryway to the "Infirmary" has had no outside lighting at all. On the strength of the recommendation of Orwell's volunteer fire department, we hired a contractor and now have our entrances and driveways well-illuminated.

Advent/Christmas Prayer

God, Creator-Father, we seek to learn a new, true meaning of Christmas. We pray that, through the Sacred Scriptures and these Holy Seasons, Jesus, the Divine Teacher, will lead us.

“Lift up your eyes on high, and see Who created these things” *(Is 40:26)*

In a world blinded by the darkness of sin, we turn to You, the Light of the World. May our good works, our very lives, so shine, that all will give You praise and glory.

“God says, ‘be silent and listen to Me” *(Is 41:1)*

Our world is noisy, Lord, rushing and impatient. Help us to “come to the quiet,” and listen deeply “with the ears of our hearts.” May we, like Mary, “treasure all these things” *(Lk 2:19)* in our hearts.

“Go up to the mountain, joyful bearer of good news! Shout with a full voice, ‘Our God is near!’” *(Is 40:9)* We pray that by our good deeds, we proclaim the faith, hope and love that is Christmas. Amen.

Christmas Blessings to all who have helped so much to celebrate Christmas at the Acres.

Father Robert Jones