

# THE Catholic Spirit

THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

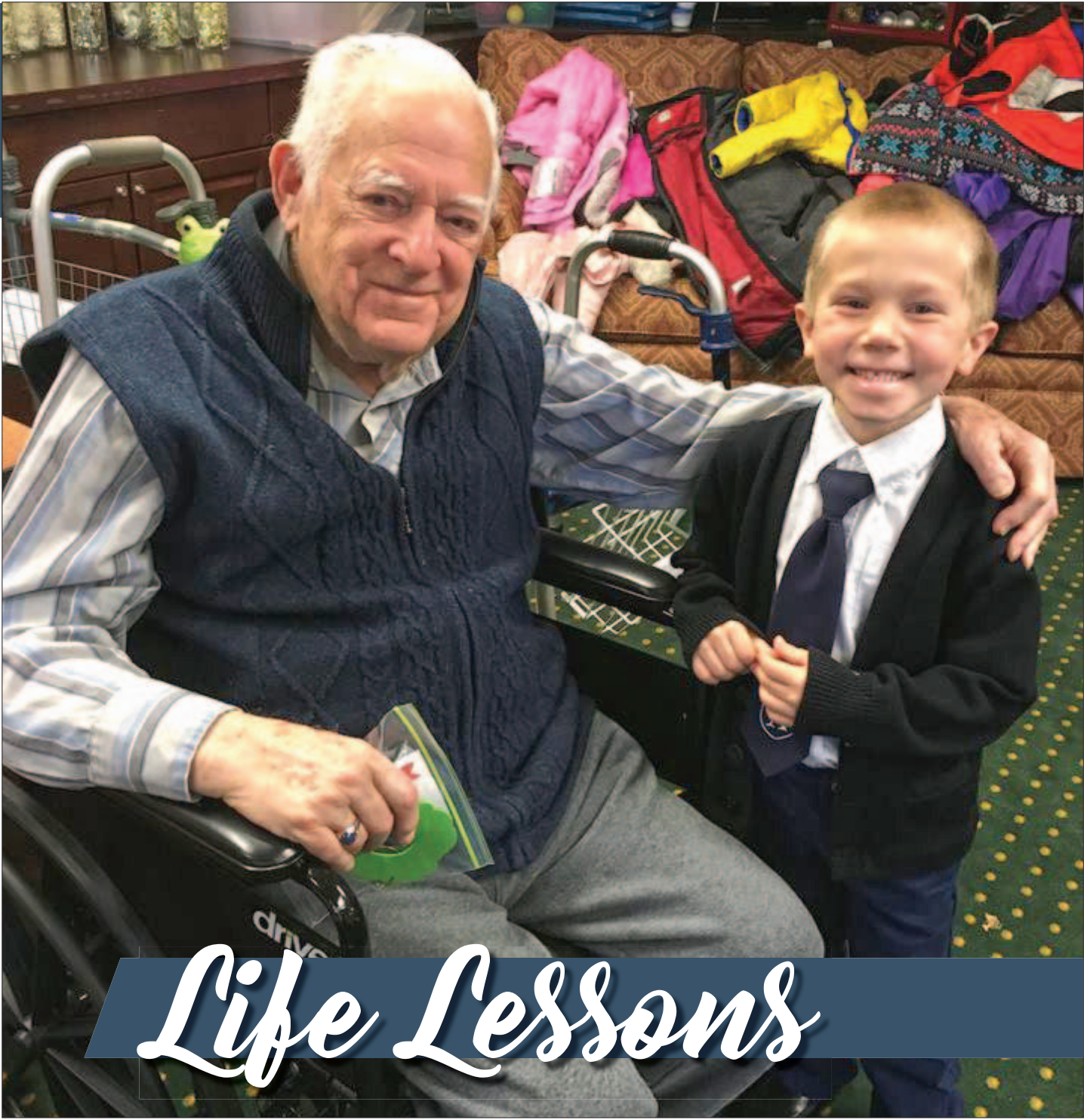
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A Special Section  
of The Catholic Spirit:  
Catholic Schools Week  
Pages 13-33

Ryan Zagari, who is in kindergarten at St. Augustine of Canterbury School, Kendall Park, poses with Leonard Arfer, a resident of Brandywine Living at Princeton. Once or twice a year, Brandywine Living reaches out to the school for an inter-generational program for the children and residents. On Dec. 20, two kindergarten classes and residents played the roles of Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men and angels in a play called "The Angels Song," which is about the first Christmas told from the angels' point of view. Quiver Farm, Pennsburg, Pa., supplied live sheep, a llama and a donkey for a nativity scene. Arfer holds a wreath ornament the children made for the residents. For more stories and photos highlighting the value of Catholic schools in the diocese in conjunction with Catholic Schools Week (Jan. 28 to Feb. 3), see pages 13-33.

— photo courtesy of St. Augustine of  
Canterbury School



## Life Lessons

This issue was mailed on Jan. 23  
Your next issue will be February 8

### INSIDE

#### Sacramental Grace

Monmouth Junction parish  
welcomes 87-year-old woman  
into Catholic faith at Mass  
*Special Feature...3, 7*



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Schools in the diocese were asked to submit photos to The Catholic Spirit that illustrated spiritual development, academic achievement or service to the community. Above left, students and faculty at Immaculate Conception School, Annandale, welcomed first responders in the area to a special prayer service, acknowledging them for their service to the community. Students presented them with decorated treat bags filled with goodies as an expression of gratitude. Below, third-graders at Our Lady of Victories School, Sayreville, hold rosary beads they made. Left, kindergarteners from St. Augustine of Canterbury School, Kendall Park, are shown during a performance of the inter-generational Christmas play "The Angels Song" at Brandywine Living at Princeton. The cast included two kindergarten classes from St. Augustine's and residents of the facility. —*photos courtesy of Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Victories and St. Augustine of Canterbury schools*



Above left, this school year celebrates the 30th anniversary of Perth Amboy Catholic School's (PACS) mission to instill Gospel values in the hearts and minds of its students and foster a love of learning through academic excellence to assure they become life-long learners. Msgr. John B. Gordon, PACS administrator, marked the opening of the school year with Mass at St. John Paul II Parish, St. Stephen worship site. During the Offertory, students brought the free-will offerings, collected after morning prayer, which totaled \$600, to assist Catholic schools affected by hurricanes in Texas and Florida. Altar servers, from left, Daniel Goncalves, Diego DeJesus, Javier DeJesus, Matthew Salinas, Emmanuel Jimenez, Leilany Rojas, Lauren Daniels and Sharon Machado. Above right, students from St. Augustine of Canterbury School, Kendall Park, pose with items collected from the school community in conjunction with Veterans Day for its Hands Across the Sea Ministry. The items were donated to soliders deploying from joint bases Dix, McGuire and Lakehurst. Right and below, students from St. James, School, Woodbridge, display examples of spiritual development and service to the community through a performance of the Passion and by collecting items for charity. —*photos courtesy of Perth Amboy Catholic, St. Augustine of Canterbury and St. James schools*



## a dozen reasons to choose Catholic Schools





# Middle school students make mats from plastic bags for homeless

By Chris Donahue  
Associate Editor

KENDALL PARK — Chelsy Goodwill enjoys creating things in the fine arts, so when the seventh-grader at St. Augustine of Canterbury School heard about a program to help the homeless and learn to crochet, it inspired her to volunteer with classmates and eighth-graders at the parochial institution.

"We [classmates] had an Odyssey of the Mind [problem solving activity] team and thought it would be cool to incorporate it. We made vines of plastic yarn," Chelsy said at a recent mat-making session. "I've always wanted to learn to crochet and this is a nice way to help the community."

At the after-school gathering, students sat at tables and on the floor to cut plastic bags into strips and tie them to make plarn (plastic bag yarn) for crocheting into six-foot-long mats. The mats provide cushion for someone sitting or sleeping and because they are not made of cloth, they are lighter and more weather-durable, said Religious Teachers Filippini Sister Mary Louise Shulas, principal, who started one of the mats herself.

Before it was announced that Bishop James F. Checchio had planned to preside at the "Evening Prayer: In Solidarity



Students at St. Augustine of Canterbury School roll plastic bags into balls of plarn (plastic bag yarn) after a recent after-school meeting. The service project includes crocheting the material to make mats for the homeless. — **Chris Donahue photo**

with the Poor" Nov. 19, seventh- and eighth-graders had become "ministers of service," said Sister Mary Louise. In conjunction with National Hunger & Homeless Awareness Week, (Nov. 11-19), the school connected with a group called Matthew 25: "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me," to learn how to make the mats.

Since mid-November, about 30 stu-

dents have been meeting for an hour after school once a week to make the mats. Each mat is made of 600 to 700 bags and takes about 40 hours to crochet. Strips of plastic made from thinner bags are used to make handles.

"We wanted to teach the children something other than collecting food or collecting money, that this is part of what they are able to do," Sister Mary Louise said.

"It is where their hearts are at this age," said Colleen Paras, Middle School religion teacher who introduced the project at St. Augustine's. "They want to encounter. They want to be connected and know that they are doing something more because they are capable."

To collect plastic bags, the school sent a memo to the students' homes. Thousands were donated. "My [car] trunk is full. I can't put any more in my classroom," said Paras, who was introduced to the project by members of Immaculate Conception Parish, Somerville.

"This is my first year at St. Augustine," Paras said. "I had introduced it to freshmen at Immaculata High School, Somerville, where I worked before. They took to it."

"I mentioned it in class very casually [at St. Augustine's] and a group of girls in the seventh grade loved the idea, went home, taught themselves how to do it through YouTube, brought it back in for an Odyssey of the Mind project and wanted to do this as service for Odyssey. When they told me I thought, 'That is amazing!'"

"It was such a nonchalant comment that left an impression on their hearts. I felt as if it left that much of an impression on them and I thought, maybe we should invite more to it? That is where

Continued on next page



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# Project teaches compassion, raises awareness about plight of needy

Continued from previous page  
the idea was born for Homeless Awareness Week."

There is no goal for how many mats the students will make, but Paras said she wants them to continue to know they are capable of doing something to help others.

"I told them we are going to keep going until you don't want to, but I want to keep adding service projects," she said. "I would like to see parents involved, too. It would be such a beautiful tribute and it also allows us to create more mats."

The project also teaches participants to have greater respect and compassion for one another, especially the homeless, said Sister Mary Louise, who would like finished mats to be donated to the needy in New Brunswick.

Seventh-grader Lacey Okamura, one of several students who learned to crochet on the Internet, said, "It's pretty simple and it is a great way for students to become a part of the community."

"It is something that we are able to do. We are not able to do that much at our age but this is something we can do in our own special way."

Seventh-grader John Michael said a teacher taught him how to knit in an after-school program but had to learn

how to crochet, too.

"I just like doing things for the poor and it [crocheting] relaxes you," he said.

## Faith in Action

To continue practicing the teaching of Matthew 25, Sister Mary Louise said on Jan. 15, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 25 students from St. Augustine of Canterbury School and seven parents volunteered to honor his legacy.

The students served the poor on their day off from school at various sites coordinated by the Center for FaithJustice. They also brought donations of toiletry items to donate to local nonprofit organizations.

Above right, eighth-grader Jennifer Palancia (left) and seventh-grader Isabella Zeferino of St. Augustine of Canterbury School cut handles off plastic bags to make plarn (plastic bag yarn). Below right, Colleen Paras, Middle School religion teacher who introduced the project, poses in front of thousands of donated plastic bags in her classroom. Right, seventh-grader Lacey Okamura crochets the plarn into a mat that will be donated to a homeless person. The plastic is used because it is light to carry and weather-resistant.

—Chris Donahue photos



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