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# Rockford Forest Hills Independent Newspaper

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Serving Rockford and Forest Hills families... Taking A Step Forward

Volume 6, Issue 10, Wednesday, March 6, 2002

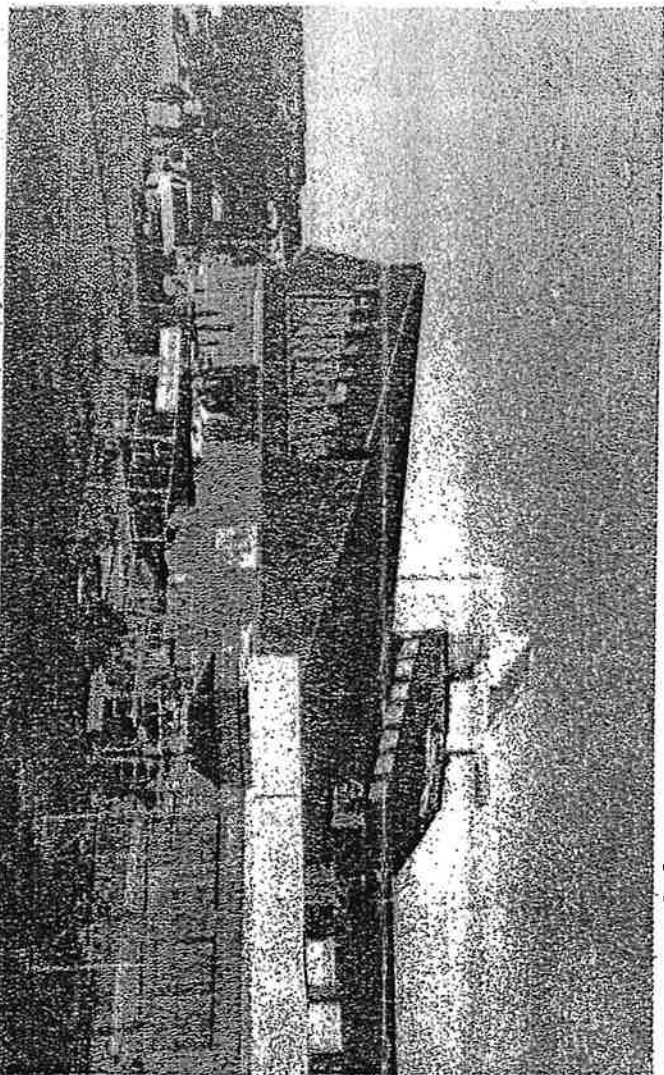
## Relationships being built in addition to church at Our Lady of Consolation Church & School

by *Tammy Bergstrom*

When construction began at Our Lady of Consolation Church and School last fall, school administrators were naturally concerned about the ramifications of the project: How would they deal with giving up space to the project when they were already working in tight quarters? How would the busy construction, so close to the school, affect classroom work? How would the students react to the project and crew, and vice versa?

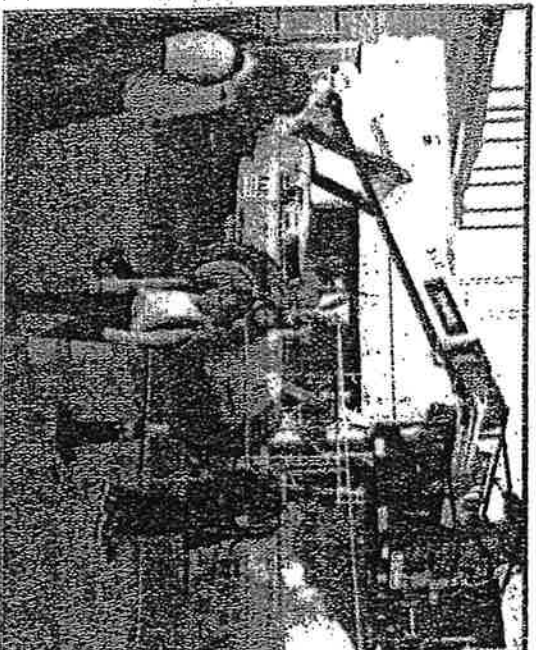
Now, just over half way into the project, school officials say they couldn't be happier with the way things are working out—not just with the project itself, but also with the relationships that have developed between the construction crew and school students and staff.

School Principal Carolyn Hardy said her biggest initial concern about the project was the safe-



ty of students, particularly since the site for parent parking and student drop-off and pick-up became part of the construction crew's staging area. "One of the biggest challenges was, how do we keep that area flowing and safe?" Hardy said. "Sam was instrumental in figuring that out." Sam is Erhardt Construction Superintendent Sam Amshey, with whom Hardy and the rest of the staff at OLC have developed a great working relationship.

"One of the things about this crew is that they've been so cooperative and just as concerned about the safety of the kids as we are," Hardy noted. "I've heard nightmare stories about construction crews being rude, leaving messes, using inappropriate



Students pass by OLC's construction. In white shirts are Nils (L) and Arne (R) Bergstrom.

language. Not this crew. They are very nice to have around."

No only has Amshey made sure his crew is not working in the area during pick-up and drop-off times, he has directed them to help out with school functions on special occasions. On a day last fall when no busses were running and all students had to be picked up privately, parents were pleasantly surprised to see several members of the construction crew expertly directing the huge line of traffic.

In addition to seeing a building grow before their eyes as they walk past the project each day, students have developed an admiration of the crew. "On one day they were moving these huge, steel trusses using a 60-foot crane and the kids were coming in and they'd just stop and stare: They were in awe," Hardy recalled. Standing outside the school doors by the construction site, Hardy said she often saw kids obviously fascinated by the work of heavy equipment operators, brick layers, roofer, etc. "There were some days standing out there that I thought, 'We should just have school out here.'"

The crew, too, have found some amusement in watching kids coming and going to school each day. Most notable is a youngster they've dubbed "Boojs," whose older brothers and sisters attend OLC. Although he's still too young for school, Boojs finds a reason to walk past the construction crew every morning and afternoon—always wearing his big rubber boots — while his mother drops off and picks up kids.

On September 11, when people seemed to be able to do little but shake their heads in disbelief, school staff was undecided about how to announce the attack to students. Hardy recalls being outside talking to family members on a cell phone and exchanging glances with stunned workers. An impromptu school prayer service was called, and school staff were very moved to see many of the construction workers attend "It was very touching to see them walk in," Hardy noted.

The construction project has necessitated the use of the school's gymnasium as a place to hold daily Mass, including the student-led Thursday morning Mass which is part of the curriculum at OLC. Fondly referred to as "St. Gym", the room now houses over 450 folding chairs — too many to take down and put up on a daily basis — so all sporting events and gym classes are being held at other venues until the project is complete.

The \$3.6 million project is expected to be finished in June, nearly doubling the church size from 6,500 to 12,000 sq. feet. That will enable the church to serve the 1,500 families who belong to OLC in three weekend Masses. The school will also see benefit, too, with a new library, new administration offices and a formal teachers' work area. Hardy and her assistant Michelle Swartz jokingly refer to Hardy's current "satellite office," a partitioned-off space in the school lunch room. Since there's no private office (just a large room that serves as the teacher's work area and break room and as administration offices) Hardy takes private phone calls in a closet, which someone had the foresight to equip with a phonejack.

"It's been difficult," Hardy admits. "But everybody is so flexible; nobody complains. We all know it's a temporary situation. I'm very thankful for having the construction crew that we have. They're just very nice to have around."