

'Mystery' has local spiritual link

BY JANICE TIGAR-KRAMER
SPECIAL WRITER

An upcoming episode of "Unsolved Mysteries" has a strong connection to several people from Observer & Eccentric communities, including Birmingham, Rochester Hills, Bloomfield Hills, Orchard Lake, Livonia and Farmington Hills.

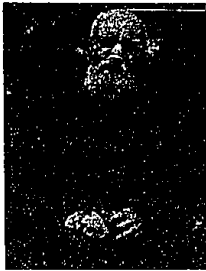
The show celebrates the spiritual work of Father Solanus Casey, a renowned Roman Catholic priest from St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit and a candidate for sainthood.

The 15-minute segment about the late Capuchin priest, who served the monastery on Mount Elliott from 1924 to 1945, airs 7 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 9, on NBC (WDIV-Channel 4).

"We've been told the edited version is great," said Judy Holmes, associate public relations director for the Father Solanus Guild in Detroit, which has 70,000 members worldwide.

"It took a nine-person crew one week to film the show last June. Throughout the project, the director said to stop them if we saw any inaccuracies. Their work was impressive to watch, so we're eager to see the show."

Kathy Cumbo, a native Livonia



Father Solanus

an and former Orchard Lake resident who graduated from Oakland University in Rochester Hills, produced the segment. She hopes the show, to be seen by some 55 million viewers, will acquaint others with the priest's work, the power of prayer, the Capuchin ministry and the monastery's soup kitchen, co-founded by Father Solanus in 1920.

"We couldn't ask for anything more," said Cumbo, who lives in California.

Holmes, of Rochester Hills, watched most of the filming with Helen Gleeson, a Bloomfield Hills resident whose brother's story is one of two featured in the show. Gleeson's family, who lived in Detroit's Rosedale Park in the 1930s, believes Father Solanus' prayers and blessings cured her brother, then age 12, and two other family members of polio.

"The doctor said my brother would never walk," remembered Gleeson. "My father was very religious and went to Father Solanus, who said we'd see a change in my brother the next day. When my brother walked in less than 24 hours, my dad said, 'Father Solanus did more than pray.'"

The story is one of thousands of similar "miracles" reported throughout the world by people of all denominations who say the priest's faith and healing power cured their diseases and even solved their personal problems. Father Solanus died in 1967 at age 87.

Gleeson said the re-creation of her family's story, which includes an actress playing her as a child, wasn't difficult to watch because she's re-lived the drama so many times in her mind.

"My strong faith in Father So-

lanus has been very instrumental in my life," said Gleeson, who started a Father Solanus Guild in Birmingham.

The show was taped in an Indian Village home selected by Tom Jacob of Rochester Hills, a location scout for Cosgrove and Mason. Talent scout Nancy Clervi of Farmington Hills-based Clervi Productions hired the actors and Carol Branstetter of Birmingham designed the costumes.

Gleeson said the house closely resembles her family home, and the Midland actor who plays Father Solanus has a striking resemblance to the tall, slightly-bullied bearded priest, whose first assignment at St. Bonaventure was as a porter. Each day, he fed the hungry, counseled the desperate and befriended the lonely who appeared at the monastery's door. He also said Mass at St. Bonaventure, but the church didn't authorize him to hear confessions until people simply began going to him themselves, according to Gleeson.

Five Detroit locations are included in the segment: St. Bonaventure Monastery, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, St. Joseph Church, St. John Hospital and the Indian Village residence.

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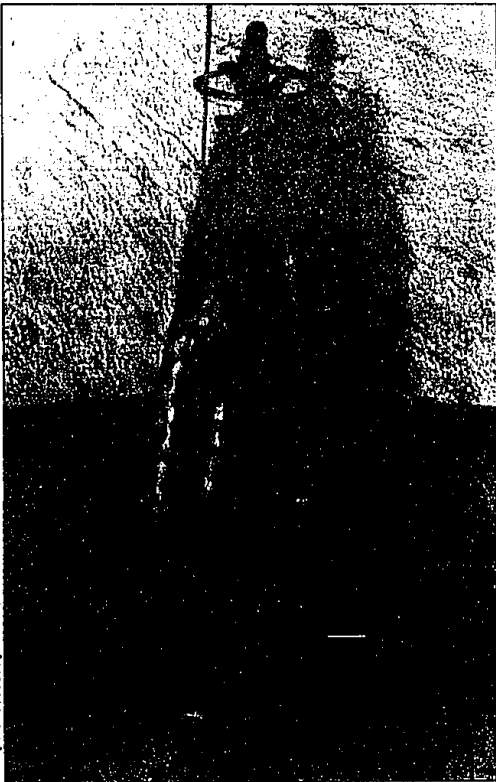
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