

Following a calling to shelter those in need

DAYTON DEANERY — Dick McBride graduated from the University of Dayton in 1957 with a degree in chemical engineering and no idea he would one day become a leader in real estate development for low-income seniors and families. But while pursuing a career in marketing for the aerospace industry, McBride was also laying the groundwork for what would become a well-regarded and diverse housing outreach organization named for the Dayton parish where it all started.

Everyday Evangelists

By Mary Caffrey Knapke

McBride was recently chosen as one of 12 "Catholic heroes" by the editors of *Catholic Digest*. The heroes are "a sure sign that the Holy Spirit is active among us — in them, and in us, every time we reach out to help, no matter the cost," wrote Dan Connors in the magazine.

Of the recognition, McBride said he was "humbled by the experience for sure."

St. Mary Development Corporation (SMDC) was established in 1989, when McBride and Sister of the Precious Blood Rose Wildenhaus set up an office in the former school at St. Mary Parish in East Dayton. But McBride's work in providing low income housing actually began a decade before, when McBride and Sister Rose met while serving on the archdiocesan Social Action and World Peace Commission.

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"We had this opportunity that I found out about, which was St. Leonard Center in Centerville. The Franciscans were going to give that up. And I thought, 'My God, what a wonderful place.'" McBride said.

He and Sister Rose developed a proposal to purchase the 240-acre property for one dollar, though some area companies were offering up to \$15 million.

"We asked them to give it to us to serve the poor. And by gosh, they did," McBride said. The result was the establishment of a senior center that continues to thrive today.

For their next project, they decided to explore comprehensive community development in east Dayton. They started a grocery store, as well as GED and Head Start programs. But the cornerstone of their work was the building of Twin Towers Place, a senior apartment complex for 100 residents.

"That was the start of our senior projects, and we just kept building after that," McBride said.

Today, low-income senior apartments exist at several locations along U.S. Route 35 throughout Dayton and Xenia, as well as in Indiana. An additional development



Dick McBride poses with Sister of the Precious Blood Rose Wildenhaus.

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is planned in Kentucky.

St. Mary Development Corporation also operates emergency housing at the Red Cross Family Living Center and single-family lease-to-purchase homes. In 2009 the organization's HomeOwnership Center helped prevent 1,000 foreclosures and helped 1,000 families become first-time home buyers.

McBride said he had intended to continue providing comprehensive community development programs, but building low income housing became the organization's focus.

And yet, "it seems like when you do a senior building in a community, you really do build up the community. It changes the whole complexion of things. Twin Towers Place really effected big change in that neighborhood eventually. It becomes like a cornerstone, I think. We didn't understand that at the time, but I think that's how it turned out."

Providing residents with quality services — and giving them resources to pursue their own interests — plays a big part in serving the community.

"Just in the senior buildings — that's without the real estate development — we spend about \$750 a resident a year in services," said Tim Bete, the organization's communication director. "In many cases, if we didn't do that, they'd have to be in a nursing home, because there's no family to bring them to the grocery store or the doctor's."

In addition, residents often take the initiative to organize their own activities. At one senior living community, residents organize a "senior prom" similar to a typical high school dance. At another, residents manage their own on-site grocery store. Other residents have organized art classes, bell choirs, Bible studies, gardening clubs or theater groups.

Service to the community and to God is what has inspired McBride's work through the 22 years since St. Mary Development Corporation was founded. He occasionally visits the Abbey of Gethse-

mani in Trappist, Ky., to reflect on his work and make sure SMDC remains focused on its mission to be a faith-based organization that creates sustainable affordable housing solutions. It's a mission that's even reflected in the organization's name, which McBride said some people have suggested changing because it's "too Catholic."

"They said we would have all kinds of trouble with the federal government," he explained. "But we've never had any trouble with anybody. As a matter of fact, it's been well thought-of, which is great. We've been true to our mission, and I think that's why we've been successful."

Mary Caffrey Knapke can be reached at mary@maryknapke.com.

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