

# The *TIMES* of.... SKINKER DEBALIVIERE

Vol. 53, No. 2

Summer 2023

<http://SDTimes.org/index.html>

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## ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS TARGETS ST. ROCH PARISH FOR CLOSURE

The Archdiocese of St. Louis has issued a decree to close St. Roch Parish, which they plan to be subsumed into the Christ the King Parish in University City. This is not the same as closing the physical church, which will remain open. In addition, there have been no decisions made by the Archdiocese to close the St. Roch Grade School. The parish community sent an appeal last week via an official response from the Parish Council and The St. Roch School Board. In addition, the Skinker DeBaliviere Community Council sent a letter to the Archdiocese requesting they repeal the decree. The Skinker DeBaliviere Community Council supported the Parish's appeal and also argued that "Closing St. Roch Parish would cause direct and substantial harm to the Skinker DeBaliviere Neighborhood, our bordering communities, and St. Roch School, which serves an exceptionally diverse population."

The Parish appeal had five arguments against the closure, stating that the decree:

1. is inconsistent with representations made to St. Roch Parish
2. is based on incorrect information, demonstrating that St. Roch Finances are strong.
3. violates Canon 50 that states "[b]efore issuing a decree, an authority is to seek out the necessary information and proofs, and insofar as possible, to hear those whose rights can be injured."
4. is inconsistent with the Evangelization Mission of the Church.
5. creates a disparate racial impact

The letter from the Skinker DeBaliviere Community Council reads as follows:

Dear Archbishop Rozanski:

On behalf of the Skinker-DeBaliviere Community Council (SDCC) and the SDCC Board of Directors, I am writing to request that you revoke your decree of May 28, 2023 regarding St. Roch Parish (the "St. Roch Decree"). Closing St. Roch Parish would cause direct and substantial harm to the Skinker DeBaliviere Neighborhood, our bordering communities, and St. Roch School, which serves an exceptionally diverse population.

Skinker DeBaliviere is a vibrant and growing urban residential neighborhood that embraces the diversity of people, housing types, transit, and public spaces.

- Development initiatives are increasing our population density.
- We are diverse, with half of our residents identifying as people of color.
- Skinker DeBaliviere is family-friendly, multi-generational, and active with cultural, faith based, social, service, and recreational pursuits.

Our neighborhood vibrancy and diversity results directly from decades of resident and institution advocacy, including the advocacy from St. Roch. At no time has the archdiocese leadership directly sought impact assessments from community leaders of Skinker-DeBaliviere regarding the impacts of St. Roch potentially closing.

We greatly mourn the loss of Monsignor Polizzi and his incredible influence on our community since he came to our Parish in 1981. We also cannot overlook that St. Roch has been a cornerstone of our community since its opening 1911 and will continue to be so in future years, if allowed.

- In 1966, St. Roch was a founding institutional member of the SDCC, which represents all residents of our community and was created to foster and facilitate neighborhood development, education, social services. St. Roch remains an active Institutional member in the Council today and many Parish members continue to serve in leadership roles. The SDCC is one of the oldest community councils



in the City of St. Louis, serving as a model for other neighborhoods.

- Saint Roch was a stabilizing force in our community through the turmoil of the 60s to 80s, as our neighborhood overcame neighborhood blight and institutional redlining.
- St. Roch has not been just a communing location for Catholics, but a center of gathering, education and service for our entire community. St. Roch hosts numerous community events and activities. In fact, many in the community speak to the St. Roch Social Catholic population that participate in as many Church events as parishioners.
- St. Roch is a strategic partner with Skinker DeBaliviere as we implement its Master Plan that was adopted by the City of St. Louis in 2017. The Plan focuses on maintaining our rich diversity while increasing population density and strengthening our position as a walkable neighborhood.

The SDCC is extremely concerned that the decision to close St. Roch was based on biased information. It is also troubling that the majority of the closures and consolidations occurred in North St. Louis City and North St. Louis County.

- Contrary to what was stated in the Decree, St. Roch is financially viable according to their Finance committee. The decision to close St. Roch appears to be based on incomplete financial information.
- There was disproportionate bias counting Mass and sacramental participation during COVID. St. Roch had an elderly priest who was limited in his ability to offer Masses and sacraments.
- The Skinker DeBaliviere neighborhood is growing with recent and planned development, which will drive increased participation in the Parish and community.
- St. Roch School is the only Parish elementary school located within the city limits and north of Highway 64. It provides a welcoming environment to students (Pre-K to 8th Grade) of diverse religious, cultural, racial and social economic backgrounds. St. Roch students draw from over 30 zip codes, many from the city. Approximately 45% of students are not Catholic and 50% are people of color. To continue in its path of delivering high quality education to a diverse set of students while operating in the city, St. Roch School needs Parish Leadership that can focus on school needs.
- Closing city Parishes creates disproportionate barriers for city residents to celebrate their faith or access Parish schools. Many city residents depend upon public Transportation and walking to access resources. Skinker DeBaliviere has been designated by the City as a transit-oriented district with three MetroLink Stops and four bus routes, (including a route that passes the Parish). One should not have to have a car in the City to celebrate ones faith.
- Students receiving Today and Tomorrow Scholarship grants was used as a justification for financial concerns with St. Roch. These scholarships are in fact open to all Catholic School students and are funded by external sources. Skinker DeBaliviere applauds that the Today and Tomorrow program recognizes that Scholarships change the equation for success, improve the lives of children and strengthen the community.

As our city communities face crises due to poverty, crime, racial inequities and gun violence, St Roch's mission to drive community engagement and stability must continue. A parish must be present in the community to impact it. Thank you for your consideration of our appeal.

The letter was signed by Executive Director Mike Reid and endorsed by the Board of Directors. The Parish and Community are waiting on the results of the appeal to the decree.

## Editor's Notes

By Linda Cross

This issue I have been thinking of a huge 'hats off' to those with decades long perseverance. Our community is facing many challenges – short term rentals, speculative absent buyers purchasing single family homes, and the latest, the choice for the Catholic Church to close the St. Roch Parish (a cornerstone of our community for over 100 years), just to name a few. There are many families in our neighborhood that have been fighting for its stability and diversity for decades. Sadly, some of these pioneers are now aging out of our neighborhood and we are losing the stories of their fights for our benefit. Having neighborhood art fairs and parties to bring people together but also marching and protesting inequities and bias. Instead of leaving the neighborhood, they fought institutional racism and redlining and even opened their own bank because established banks wouldn't make loans for our neighborhood. Luckily our SDCC board seems energized and excited about possibilities. We are seeing more and younger volunteers bring their energy and ideas. There is always more to do. Neighbors can start by just getting to know each other. Say hello, keep your porch lights lit, and look out for each other. As I was feeling overwhelmed a couple of weeks ago, I got an email from a neighbor that simply said, don't forget that street cleaning is this week, remember to move your cars. That's all it takes. The first step in developing a community. Care about one another. I am still hopeful. In the meantime, when you see wrong – like the closure of one of our faith institutions – fight like hell to right it.

## SKINKER DEBALIVIERE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OPEN MEETING 4/10 7PM

### 1. MIKE REID – Executive Director

Mike provided an introduction of the SDCC, as well as background of the council and our mission.

Highlights from 2022:

- Spring clean up
- Rags to Riches
- The Free Agents performed on September 2
- Porchfest in October was a success
- Wintermarkt in December

Special thanks to all the volunteers who helped with these events.

### 2. SHAMEEM CLARK-HUBBARD – Alderperson for the 10th Ward

Shameem provided an introduction of herself, spoke about the new 10th Ward, let everyone know about her travelling one-on-one meetings held the last Monday of the month from 6:30-7:30pm. This is an opportunity to ask questions and get additional information about the community. The first one for this new term will be Monday April 24th at Grace Methodist Church.

Questions posed to the alderperson:

- Recycling – why is the recycling being dumped into the trash?

Answer – the city is working with Bright Side to attend to this operation, there is a foreman who is supposed to be surveying the recycling dumpsters to ensure they aren't contaminated, which they have been for a long time, with non-recyclable material. All complaints need to be submitted to our Neighborhood Improvement Specialist – she provided her cell phone # 314-393-1393

### 3. TRACY GRANNEMAN – Council President

Tracy provided a brief introduction of goals and objectives as well as the rest of the council.

- Goals will be focused on the following broad topic areas:
  - Governance
  - Communication and Engagement
  - Finances

### 4. COMMITTEE REPORTS

#### Historic District Committee

Anna Marie Bliss provided the committee goals and an overview.

- Transparency of codes, policies, and procedures
- Awareness of codes, policies, and procedures
- Working with other committees
- Providing an orientation for those in the neighborhood – new buyers and res estate agents

#### Community Development

Nicole Blumner provided the committee report

- Working on creating neighborhood projects
- They meet on an ad-hoc basis
- IMO's proposal for a walk-up facility on Delmar and DeGiverville is not happening
- They provided input for the demolition for the building on Delmar
- They worked with the city on the traffic study
- They are currently working to provide input for the new radio/TV tower going up on DeBaliviere, still hasn't received any feedback from the community as of yet.

#### Security Committee

Grady Vaughn provided the committee report

- Working on reengagement of the Metrolink, security gates will be going into the stations this summer to help with security meet monthly with area police officials.
- Spoke about the issue with the business, Blue, on Delmar – they are working on having the business shut down.

#### Beautification Committee

Andy Cross provided the committee report

- Breakfast Garden tour will be held June 3rd, this is a great neighborhood mixer. Tickets are \$10.
- Dog show is scheduled for June 13 at 4 corners



### Guidelines for Submitting Copy

The Times welcomes unsolicited articles and letters. Because of the small size and volunteer nature of the writing staff, the quality and range of the Times has always depended in large part on submissions from non-staff area residents.

The writer is responsible for the accuracy of the data, including times, dates, location, and particularly the spelling of names. The editor retains the right to omit or alter any material. Opinions expressed in Commentaries are the opinion of the author.

**Deadline for next issue: August 15, 2023**  
for our September/October issue. Please send copy by e-mail to Linda Cross, [lcross@sdtimes.org](mailto:lcross@sdtimes.org).

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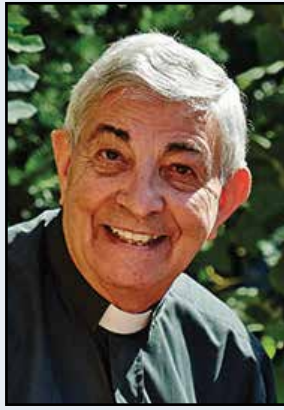
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# News of Neighbors

Monsignor Salvatore Polizzi, the long-time beloved and formidable pastor of St. Roch parish passed away on April 24th at the Mother of Good Counsel Home. One of 11 children of Sicilian immigrants, he went to St. Louis Preparatory Seminary and Kenrick Seminary and was ordained in 1956. He also earned a master's degree in urban planning from St. Louis University and was the first priest to receive the school's alumni merit award.



Monsignor Salvatore Polizzi

Msgr. Polizzi was assigned to St. Roch Church in 1981 after serving at St. Ambrose and St. Catherine parishes. He remained pastor at St. Roch until his death at the age of 92. He was active in community revitalization efforts and was known to help parishioners through difficult situations by paying mortgages and offering scholarships to St. Roch School. Msgr. was often quoted as saying that no child would be turned away from St. Roch due to inability to pay.

He was a founding member of Operation Food Search and was a former member of the boards of the city Land Reutilization Authority and the old St. Louis Regional Medical Center. He will be greatly missed by his community.



Jamie Kenyon

Jamie Kenyon, a resident of 59XX DeGiverville graduated from Washington University in St. Louis in May with a bachelor's degree in sustainability from University College. Jamie, who has worked for Metro for over two decades, plans to use his degree to advocate for mass transit.



Maddy Boxdorfer

Maddy Boxdorfer of the 6100 block of Kingsbury graduated from Nerinx Hall High School and plans to attend St. Louis University School of Nursing in the fall.

Lily Granneman of the 6000 block of McPherson Graduated from St. Roch School and plans to attend St. Joe's Academy in the fall.



Lily Granneman and family

Colton Tiede, of the 6100 block of Kingsbury graduated from Metro Academic and Classical High School with an international Baccalaureate. He will attend McGill University in Montreal, Canada this fall.



Colton Tiede



Cal Kreuger

Cal Kreuger from the 6100 block of McPherson graduated from St. Louis University High School and will be attending Occidental College in Los Angeles, CA in the fall.



Beth Bender

Beth Bender of the 6000 block of Kingsbury retired after more than 25 years in the St. Louis School system. Beth's most recent position was as the Associate Superintendent of College and Career Readiness.



Maris Ebeling

Maris Ebeling of Parkview graduated from the University of Missouri with her Doctorate in Physical Therapy. She is currently employed as a physical therapist with RPI therapy services.

Gertie McGroarty was the recipient of the Principal's Award for the Seventh Grade at Visitation Academy in her first year attending the school. The award is selected by the middle and upper school principals and given to a young woman who demonstrates a consistent dedication to the community, to the students, faculty, administration, and the sisters.



Gertie McGroarty



Patrick McGroarty and Will Kreuter

Patrick McGroarty and Will Kreuter, both St. Roch class of 2021 and St. Louis University High School class of 2025 were awarded the Fr. Martin Hagar Award at the SLUH end of year awards ceremony. The award recognizes the love of the school, generosity in giving of self, and joy in coming to school every day.

## Do you have news to share?

Please send your submissions via email with the subject line News of Neighbors to [lcross@sdtimes.org](mailto:lcross@sdtimes.org). Be sure to mark it "News of Neighbors". We love to hear about neighbors accomplishments, awards, travels, weddings, anniversaries, births, and more!

# THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND What About Weeds?

By Mark Banaszak

Summer can be a time when gardens and lawns look less groomed and managed, and many neighbors often resort to the kinds of weed killer preparations that you can find in a large array of sizes, strengths and formulations that can be difficult to understand. It is difficult to decide how to control the unwanted plants, when they seem to be taking over our lawns and garden beds.



This is not a new problem. Over two thousand years ago, Latin Poet Horace wrote, "You can chase nature away with a pitchfork, but she always comes back." Plants in the wrong place have been bothering humans since we planted fields and gardens. They bother us for good reason, because the unwanted plants can outcompete, overshadow or strangle plants that we want to grow. So we have to control them.

To solve the problem we tend to look for quick solutions, like herbicides claiming to kill hundreds of weed varieties in just a few hours. Solutions like that seem to work for a year, but never carry over to the next. The flower bed or patch of grass that we treat one year is just as weedy the next, and if you look closely at the labels, you will see all kinds of warnings. Those warnings, regulated by the EPA, are intended to show the toxicity to humans. Although some herbicides only have the caution label (the lowest level of toxicity to humans), they still may be very unhealthy for pets. The cumulative effects of herbicide use can also be worrisome. Although pesticides may not be directly toxic to animals, they can often have problematic health effects. A good example is glyphosate and its effect on bees. Although it isn't poisonous, it does affect bees' immunity to disease, resulting in an increased likelihood of disease among bee colonies.

You can, however, use some common strategies for lawns and gardens that don't involve spraying herbicides. Mowing high is often used for lawns. Most unwanted plants tend to grow close to the ground. Letting the grass grow higher will often let the grass overshadow the unwanted plants. Shorter grass heights allow seeds of unwanted plants to get the sunlight they need for germination.

Adding layers of mulch, like wood chips, hay or leaf litter, is effective in areas where you don't have grass, like garden beds or around trees. Any unplanted area is likely to grow unwanted plants, and these plants

often quickly spread seed to other areas, like a lawn. A layer of mulch three inches or more can prevent the weed seeds already on the soil from germinating, and keep new weed seeds from coming into contact with the soil, giving them little chance to germinate. Mulch also keeps water in the soil, so it can help the plants that you do want.

Hand digging weeds, especially at the right time, can help. It is an old piece of farm and garden wisdom to "pull wet and hoe dry." In other words, it is better to dig out weeds when the soil is wet, because it is much easier to get the entire root system, reducing the chance that the plant can regrow. Pulling them when they are younger is important too. This is especially important in

places where there are fewer wanted plants, like in flower beds. There are many great hand weeding tools available at any hardware or garden stores for less than the price of a bottle of herbicide, and the weeding tools will last you many many growing seasons. The weed killer will not.

A final strategy that may help many is that it can be just fine to let it be. It is not unhealthy for grass lawns to have a mixture of plants. Plant diversity can help the health of your soil, the pollinator populations, and the wildlife that manages to survive in our urban neighborhood. Some clover, a dandelion, or a few violets doesn't make it look worse, it makes it look better. It is unlikely that you will be successful in preventing them all, so spend time reducing your weeds, but remember the poet's observation that no matter how you chase nature away - herbicides or pitchforks - she will always come back.



Thank you to all who flatten their boxes!

It saves space in the Blue Bin and leaves room for more recyclables.

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**SDCC Open Meeting** *continued from page 2*

- Brightside will be providing flowers for the plant exchange

**Community Engagement**

June Vaughn provided the committee report

- They are working to revitalize and increase the community building with block captains

**Zoning Committee**

Marvin Nodiff provided the committee report

- This committee meets twice a month
- They are looking for quality of housing experience and ensuring we have that in our area.
- Making sure the community experience is engaging
- Providing Education of the city ordinances for all residents.

**Washington University**

JoAnna Schooler provided an update on Wash U happenings.

- Move-out/move-in will be happening soon, working n doing an audit of all the alleys for the trash that will come. Hoping for improvements with this process moving forward.
- Thank you for attending and providing feedback regarding the Skinker/Forest Park Parkway intersection. They are utilizing the feedback to make small tweaks before moving forward.
- If there are any questions regarding the properties recently acquired on Delmar, please let her know.
- The university does not plan to make changes to buildings. The only significant change the university has planned for these buildings is the change in ownership. We recognize the role small businesses provide to the Delmar Loop, and we remain committed to preserving the vibrant nature of the Loop.

**Public Comment**

Mark 58XX DeGiverville voiced concerns regarding the shooting on Delmar at the business, Blue, Saturday March 29. He would like to know if there are cameras in Lucier Park, if we can get them, and what else is being done to keep the area safe.

Josh 57XX Kingsbury Place spoke about two problem properties:

- 5806 Westminster – pit of water as they have dug for a foundation and haven't done any further work.
- Winter Garden Apartments sidewalk deteriorated by machines, what can be done about this?

There have been a number of development improvements not being communicated enough, the community would appreciate more information regarding any area developments.

Karen Stokes for Grace Methodist Church offered to help get petitions signed to assist with managing security risks and concerns in the community.

Mike spoke about a representative from the Commercial District joining the council in the near future.

We need volunteers for all events over the summer and fall, as well as additional volunteers on all our standing committees. If you're interested in assisting with any of these things, please contact the SDCC office.

The recording this meeting will be posted on the SDCC website as well as on Youtube.

# KIDS CORNER

By Jenny Mathews

## NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT

### Can you find ...

- an acorn
- flying insect
- tree stump
- spiderweb
- squirrel
- moss on a tree
- 4 different types of birds
- 3 types of leaves
- a rock big enough to stand on
- pinecones under a coniferous tree
- red flower
- tree with bark that is NOT brown
- animal tracks in the mud/dirt
- a path into the woods
- an animal making noise
- something you didn't expect to see



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## YAPPY HOUR IS FOR THE DOGS

By SDCC Dog Park Committee

Grilled brats, hotdogs and refreshing beverages drew old and new neighbors to Four Corners to share their support for creating a Dog Park in Skinker-DeBaliviere.

Planned for the vacant parcel north of the school annex on the east side of Des Peres, the facility will provide a space for Dog Moms and Dads to let their pups socialize with others and run around off the leash. The event was held May 25.

“Yappy Hour was our second event to raise awareness and funds to make this a reality,” said SDCC Dog Park Committee chair, Kaitlin Daniels, whose day job is business professor at Washington University in St. Louis.

Drawings depicting the Dog Park show the narrow parcel will accommodate two separate enclosures shaped like dog bones. Complying with city permit requirements, small dogs will have the run of approximately 2,000 square feet (a maximum of four dogs at the same time) and large breeds will have approximately 3900 square feet (up to seven dogs).

“The event even attracted neighbors who don’t own dogs,” observed committee member Nick Stefani, an engineer who handled the grill. “People realize that a dog park within easy walking distance will be an asset and amenity for the entire Skinker-DeBaliviere neighborhood.” The closest facility is in University City.

Committee member Callie Kesel said, “Fencing is an important design element because it must be secure and functional as well as representative of our historic neighborhood.”



Kesel, an architect, is coordinating with SDCC’s Historic Preservation Committee to design a combination wrought iron and mesh enclosure.

Funds are needed to open the Dog Park with fresh water supply, fencing, a secure gate, and clean-up facilities. “We’re seeking contributions and grants for start-up expenses,” Daniels explained, “as well as an endowment to provide for insurance and maintenance over future years. Our goal is to offer annual memberships at a level competitive with other dog parks.”

To publicize the event, Dog Park volunteers walked door-to-door to distribute thousands of “Yappy Hour” flyers designed by committee member Andy Cross. Attorney Marvin J. Nodiff (ret.) is helping with insurance.

Daniels encourages all residents to voice their interest in the SDCC Dog Park. A survey is available, and donations may be made, on the dog park’s website: <https://sdccdogpark.wixsite.com/home>.



## THE GREAT DOG SHOW

is the next scheduled event,  
with prizes for  
Best Shaggy Coat, Fluffiest Tail,  
and other remarkable canine features.

### Website



**Tuesday, June 13**  
**at 7pm,**  
**Four Corners**  
next to  
the children’s  
playground.

## ST. ROCH IN THE 70’S: HOW THE PARISH CHURCH HELPED SAVE THE NEIGHBORHOOD

By Jo Ann Vatcha

During the turbulent times of the 60’s and 70’s, Skinker-DeBaliviere benefited from the presence of St. Roch and its cleric, Father (later Monsignor) Robert Peet. The Roman Catholic Church divides metropolitan areas into parishes, and, generally, Catholics attend their parish church. Research in the Boston area, as shown in *Urban Exodus* by Gerald Gamm, has demonstrated that white Catholics are not as likely to flee an area when racial change occurs because of their parish ties. St. Roch Parish is a prime example.

Father Peet took part in the march in Selma, Alabama, during the civil rights movement and felt a deep commitment to equality. As Jean Eberle pointed out in 1981:

Father Peet has been an unobtrusive but dominant force in the revitalization of the Skinker-DeBaliviere area. When he arrived in May of 1962, the “smart money” people at real estate companies, lending institutions, and insurance firms were writing off this neighborhood. At the same time, the changes arising from Vatican II were going into effect in the Catholic Church, so many felt double uncertainty and frustration. One of Father Peet’s first announcements was that St. Roch’s would build a new school building which would include a long-needed gymnasium. This enabled the sixty St. Roch’s children attending other schools to return to St. Roch’s in 1964, and made space available for other local students.

Then, in 1970, St. Roch’s made a bold announcement, that it would open its school to non-Catholics. Many, many parishioners worked hard with the larger community to make this experiment a success. Dr. Jose M. Sanchez, Jr., president of the school board, announced that “St. Roch’s intends to become a genuine neighborhood school while continuing to maintain its traditional high academic standards.” Jim Hitchcock pointed out in his 1970 article in the *TIMES* predecessor, *THE PAPER*, that:

St. Roch’s has consistently had the best record of any parochial school in the city...and ranked first in the Iowa Basic Tests...The school also boasts some distinguished alumni, including the late Dr. Tom Doley, the famed Laos surgeon,

and Michael Harrington, author of *The Other America*, a book credited with focusing national attention on the problem of poverty in the 60’s.

The school and the church were opened to the wider community. Many SDCC meetings were held at the church hall, and “Scariot Hall” was the site of numerous parties where Catholics and “social Catholics”, white and black, would gather. These events heightened the sense of community for all involved. Lana Stein interviewed George and Rose Storey for the *TIMES* in 1999:

And, there were parties, especially the annual St. Patrick’s Dinner. The Storeys noted that Father Peet had a beautiful voice and loved to sing. He knew all the Irish tunes and sang *Danny Boy*. But, they’d bring down the house when Kathleen Hamilton played the piano and Monsignor sang “Saloon.” The words went, “Saloon, saloon, saloon, It runs through my head like a tune.” There was a lot of good fellowship and a lot of neighborhood-building, too.

It is fortunate for Skinker-DeBaliviere that Father Peet, Sister Leo Ann, and so many parishioners believed in the neighborhood. Peggy Hermes remembered that Father Peet used to walk around the neighborhood in the evening so that residents would see him and feel less afraid. He helped many through darker, more troubled times here. His continual human touch, his steady involvement with the Council and other neighborhood organizations, his approachability, and his linkage of St. Roch to the community played an immeasurable part in the neighborhood’s comeback. Sister Leo Ann Bub, principal of St. Roch’s School for many years, was also a fearless fighter for the children and neighborhood. She worked closely with non-Catholic parents and lay teachers, as did the other Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Charles, Sister Dorothy, Sister Herbert, and others who taught at the school during this challenging time.

Following Father Peet’s retirement, in 1981 Msgr. Sal Polizzi was named by the Archbishop as pastor of St. Roch’s. Msgr. Polizzi built on that strong foundation and ensured the viability and fiscal health of the school and church for a long time to come.

Jo Ann Vatcha, *THE NEIGHBORHOOD CHRONICLES*, June, 2000

# PRIDE MONTH

By Emily Cross

This month, June, is Gay Pride Month!

As an asexual, I am excited to celebrate this time of awareness, celebration, and support of my community. Growing up ace was confusing; it's not an orientation most people know about. It definitely wasn't included in any school curriculum, so I wasn't aware that there were other people like me until well into high school. Even then, I had been brought up in the Catholic school system, where gender identity and orientation are not addressed. I'm forever grateful to the internet for teaching me that, not only is there a word for how I feel, but there are many, many other people who feel the same way I do! (Approximately the population of Denmark, if reported percentages are to be believed.) Fortunately, I have a very supportive family, who just want me to be happy; whether that means I end up with a boy, a girl, or neither. I'm very grateful to have always felt supported and safe in this neighborhood, and I hope that this article will help someone else feel supported and safe, as well. Happy Pride Month!!



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# ST. ROCH AND SKINKER DEBALIVIERE

By Lana Stein

The relationship between St. Roch and Skinker DeBaliviere reminds me of a story about my cousin Ed. Ed was working in Texas. He lost his job and had a breakdown. His parents brought him back to Massachusetts where the rest of the family lived. Ed reentered community life by volunteering at a shelter for dogs. There he found Woody, a black lab mix. He thought he rescued this dog but the dog also rescued him, providing the love and comfort he needed.

When our neighborhood began to transition racially, many thought it would soon become all Black, much as the area north of Delmar had done. But St. Roch joined with two other churches and Washington University to stabilize the neighborhood and keep it diverse. At the 100th anniversary of the church, Msgr. Polizzi referred to the 75 families who had remained within the parish boundaries. They stayed and helped to insure the church as a fulcrum of activity to create diversity. The priests worked in their own way to keep the parish and school alive. And, unusual in urban neighborhoods, ours did not tip. Many of the residents who remained were part of the church. Parishioners and parish were stalwarts in enabling a new phenomenon, racial and economic integration. Msgr. felt the 75 families and the role of the church made the difference. The parishioners and school families provided the support needed by the church. As in Ed's case, reciprocity led to successful outcomes.

The story is not over and closing St. Roch will only damage the church's role in our neighborhood but also delete the Catholic presence in our midst. We need to face the future together, to continue working for the goals that have United us. Our neighborhood needs St. Roch. St. Roch needs our neighborhood.



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# IN YOUR EAR

By Hawkeye Z. Hoerr, Commentary in the TIMES since 1980

## Continued from last month

My eyes dilated as I stared into Angel Fred's face. "What?" I asked, "You want me to help YOU!?" My mind was reeling so much that I had to lean against a nearby tombstone in order to retain my balance. I mean, it was near midnight, and I was at the cemetery about to talk with my mom. OK, "talk" isn't the right verb. She has been gone since 2011 so I didn't expect a conversation. I simply went to speak to her, hoping that just maybe, possibly, perhaps she would hear me. I had done this quite a few times before and there was no incident. But this time was different. Outrageously different.

I didn't expect a tall, feathered body with a name tag that said ANGEL FRED to be standing next to me. He had wings, was wearing a natty corduroy sportscoat, and he asked me for help. Me? Me helping an angel? I was more than amazed.

Angel Fred told me that he represented a host of angels (yep, that's the official term) that had met because they were concerned about the decline in religiosity on our planet. Have you noticed how many restaurants are located in former churches? They wisely decided (how could any decision by angels not be wise?) that Dante dropped the ball when he only wrote about the levels of hell. "It's too bad he didn't write about the levels of Heaven," Fred said to me, rolling his angelic eyes, "that would help keep people in the pews." The host of them decided that if people knew what is available in the various levels of Heaven, the attendance at religious houses for occasions other than weddings, funerals, and choir recitals would increase.

Not trusting traditional or social media to get the word out about the levels of Heaven (I told you they were wise), the angels' steering committee sent Fred to tell me that I was chosen to spread the word in my insightful column in The Times of Skinker DeBaliviere. Wise again, they were, and here we are!

The angels recognized my stunning track record. Previously in In Your Ear columns, I've written about the beauty of bacon, how to remove fleas from your dog, and the myriad shortcomings of the Republican Party (a reoccurring theme), so writing about the levels of Heaven seemed easy-peasy. "Sure, I am up for this task," I said to Angel Fred. Brimming with confidence, I thought, "What could go wrong?"

Fred smiled, put his feathered hands on my shoulders and closed his eyes. I closed mine too, and I felt a jolt of energy pass through my body. It was like the experience that you have the night before a colonoscopy, only everything was shooting out of my head. Yes, I felt flushed. (Sorry, couldn't resist.) My mind went vapid, totally blank, infinity was in my head, and then it was filled. My brain was overwhelmed, filled with factoids and emotions from my pockets, libraries, and blind dates.

I must have looked puzzled because Fred said, "I understand why you're confused, so I decided that we'll tour hell before you can see Heaven. Context is always helpful."

Suddenly it became much hotter and I felt like I was falling. When I opened my eyes, there were fires and snakes everywhere, stalled cars and crashing airplanes, and I could hear screams. Pat Boone was singing and flames were jumping out of a mountain of clouds. The clouds were connected by a giant escalator and each level of hell had a neon flashing welcome sign, and all of them were misspelled. I didn't know there were so many different ways to misspell welcome.

It was obvious that every level of hell was crowded, standing room only, and I could see many TRUMP signs. Every cloud was ugly and disdainful, and the levels of anguish were clearly varied. I could see that Hell's level one is that you've clogged the toilet at a party, while level two is realizing that your tattoo is misspelled. Level three is a continual root canal without anesthetic, level four is your in-laws moving into your home where they teach Marimba lessons, and level five being stuck in an elevator with three people who are seasick. Levels six and seven were too high for me to see, and that was fine with me!

Angel Fred told me – or maybe he telepathed me – that there is some flexibility. Someone can move among levels based on behavior in hell: bad is better than terrible which is better than horrible which is better than nasty. Given prompts, a worse response scores higher; this is hell, after all. Kicking someone when they are down or taking candy from

a baby earn points which can be used to move up to a better level of damnation. Parking in a handicapped zone results in double negative points. Conversely, charitable behavior and kind comments are bad and should be avoided.

I only observed for a few minutes but I was nauseous, afraid, and sweating profusely. I think my tie was scorched and I could tell that my beard was burnt. Thank goodness my life's due date wasn't due and this was just a brief hellish visit.

"Enough," I said to Angel Fred, "let's get out of here!" I was eager for him to show me the Levels of Heaven so I could begin to spread the positive word.

More to follow...



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