

Sacred Heart parishioner sees miracle



Kassia Micek Published 7:00 pm CDT, Thursday, October 13, 2005



He went to the Our Lady of Lourdes shrine from Sept. 9-19 for a ten-day pilgrimage with a group of about 30 volunteers with Our Lady of Lourdes Hospitality North American Volunteers, LTD.

"I didn't know this until I got there, but everyone who goes to Lourdes is called there," said Harrell, a Sacred Heart Catholic Church parishioner.

In February 1858, the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in the grotto where the shrine is now located. Soubirous, now referred to as St. Bernadette, uncovered a fresh-water spring in the grotto at the request of the Blessed Mother that many believe has healing powers.

Millions of pilgrims travel to the shrine every year and immerse themselves in the water hoping for a miracle to their illness.

While helping disabled pilgrims off of trains, Harrell met one man who experienced a miracle after visiting the shrine. Vittorio Micheli, of Italy, developed bone cancer in the socket of his hip pocket. He was sent home from his position as a soldier in the Italian army and did not receive treatment for the disease. In 1963, Micheli visited the shrine at his mother's request and immersed the left side of his body into the cold spring water, since his right leg was in a full cast. He was immediately able to put weight on this "bad leg" and walk.

"It wasn't his faith that sent him to Lourdes or got him healed. It was his mom's," Harrell said. "That day was definitely pivotal, highly emotional and defining for me. It helped me to understand not only who Mary is, but also her place as far as Christology."

Medical Bureau at Lourdes approved Micheli's miracle, which is referred to as Miracle 63. More than 4,000 medically inexplicable cures have been presented to the bureau, according to a press release. The Catholic Church has accepted 66 as valid.

Harrell made the volunteer pilgrimage in response to a February on-air appeal on EWTN by Marlene Watkins, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospitality North American Volunteers, LTD founding director.

"Our primary mission is to bring English-speaking volunteers to Lourdes, France," said Theresa Stiner, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospitality North American Volunteers, LTD board of director's member. "It's pretty awesome what we're able to do. We're happy to be able to be an instrument of the Lord."

The organization was created in 2002 and brings almost 15 volunteer groups to Lourdes every year. More than six million pilgrims travel to the Our Lady of Lourdes shrine every year, making the shrine's yearly attendance equivalent to that of Walt Disney World, Stiner said. In order to serve the pilgrims, more than 7,000 volunteers are needed to work at the shrine every year, in addition to 400 paid employees. Volunteers help the pilgrims, many disabled, to and from facilities located at the shrine, which houses a nursing home/hospital type of facility for pilgrims and volunteers. Volunteers also serve as crowd control at night processions, which draw more than 30,000 pilgrims, Harrell said.

To learn more about Our Lady of Lourdes Hospitality North American Volunteers, LTD call (315) 476-0026 or visit www.LourdesVolunteers.org.

Harrell is planning to speak about his pilgrimage at Sacred Heart. For more information call the church at (936) 756-8186. Kassia Micek can be reached at kmicek@mail.hcnonline.net.