Mercy volunteer restores figures for Nativity scene

By Shelley Strebe
Public Relations Assistant

Early this April, Food Service Director Bob Brennan was making room in the back closet of the cafeteria for an air handling system that was being installed. He came across several boxes which looked as if they were stored away for years. Opening one of the boxes, Brennan found pieces of an old German Nativity scene.

The box contained two Nativity scenes that were an eyesore. All the pieces were piled in a box without any form of packaging. The angel’s wings were severely damaged and one wing tip was missing. Many of the figures were chipped, with fingers missing, heads detached. But the figurines had meaning in a Biblical sense and there was the mystery of where they came from. They were made in Germany, but were they brought over by the Sisters? How old are these scenes? How did they end up in storage? What is the story behind them?

Bob Brennan decided to have them restored, but how was beyond his expertise. He contacted Betty Howe, Auxiliary President, and asked her if she would post a note saying, “In need of an artist.” Dolly Pahlow, an artist at heart, answered the note. After looking at the scenes, she found the repairs to be more than a paint brush could perform but decided to take the challenge. She took the 18 pieces home where her husband helped her set up the workplace. This is where Mrs. Pahlow would be putting her extra time.

Mrs. Pahlow started working on the project in April. Her experience with modeling paste and using support materials was minimal. Guided by artwork magazines and books, Dolly was able to repair the broken pieces. The biggest task was to reconstruct the missing tip of the angel’s wing. Carefully drilling into the brittle ceramic figurine, she was able to construct a support system that would keep the wing together. After molding the plaster, she let dry. Mrs. Pahlow continued molding all the pieces and the process was successful. She carefully matched her paints with the colors of the old figures, to make them as close to the original as possible.

The results were fantastic! The two scenes that consisted of 18 pieces are beautiful thanks to Mrs. Pahlow’s hours (more than 50 hours) and patience.

Everyone will be able to see and admire the Nativity scenes soon. The scene will be placed in the lobby of the Hazel Street entrance where it will be highlighted by lights and a soft crepe material.

Thanks, Mrs. Pahlow for your time and effort in bringing more beauty and history to Mercy.

(Editors Note: Anyone knowing more about the Nativity scenes should contact the Public Relations office.)
Restoration project is 'labor of love'

By Jo Zorr
OF THE NORTHWESTERN

And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

It's called the Nativity — the birth of Jesus, the Christ child.

Some 2,000 years have passed since he was born in Bethlehem. Many Christians today honor his birthday by displaying a creche, or manger scene.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David.)

To be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child.

Every Christmas since the early 1980s, a hand-painted plaster nativity set has graced a table in the cafeteria at Mercy Medical Center.

Each figure in the exquisitely fashioned 20-piece set is stamped "Made in Germany."

Bob Brennan, food service director for the hospital, shared what he knows about the manger scene.

One day, while cleaning out the dark recesses of a dungeon-like closet, "An employee lifted out a dusty cardboard box filled with the broken pieces of a nativity set," Brennan said. "It was in sad shape. The heads and limbs of several of the human figures were broken off, and animals were missing legs and ears."

"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

One day, Dolly Pahlow, a volunteer in the gift shop, found a note waiting for her. Would she please do some needed artwork repair on the nativity set?

She agreed, then began by drilling tiny holes and re-attaching heads, hands and feet.

"I like a challenge, and I like to make old things look new," Pahlow said. "I had to make a whole new wing for the angel."

And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and

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were sore afraid. a creche figures were d and chipped, Pahlow "People used to pick them their heads."

If the angel said unto them, not: for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which be to all people.

Restoring the figures was a joy for Pahlow. "It months to do them." Using ies, she tried to paint the s in their original, antic colors.

unto you is born this day

praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

For 12 years, the restored Nativity scene has welcomed guests to the hospital cafeteria, where Brennan insists it be placed at a child's eye level.

Besides the holy family, the set includes shepherds, animals and the wisemen with their multi-racial backgrounds and gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

"The only casualty of the Nativity scene is the stick that used to be in the camel boy's hand," Brennan said.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

Much like the manger in Mercy's cafeteria.