

The Shrine of Saint Joseph's Friends, Inc. NEWSLETTER

1220 N. 11th Street • St. Louis, Missouri 63106-4614 • Rectory Phone (314) 231-9407
e-mail: info@shrineofstjoseph.org

WINTER - SPRING ISSUE 2024

Johann Pfeffer and the Shrine's Historic Musical Treasure

The Shrine's pipe organ, built by Johann Pfeffer and Sons, is a meticulously crafted instrument which was built and then assembled on the organ loft in 1890 and is now 134 years old. The builder, Johann Pfeffer, was born in Stetten by Heigerloch in Germany in 1823. Pfeffer and his wife came to America in 1854 eventually making their way to St. Louis in 1858, and is listed in the city's directory of 1859 as an organ technician and builder. He and his wife had 9 children, several of which worked in their father's organ business.

The earliest pipe organ attributed to Pfeffer was built around 1860 and is located in Starckenburg, MO. Pfeffer was considered a leading builder of pipe organs in the Midwest—no official list exists, but it is believed that Pfeffer built between 200 and 600 pipe organs. His firm built some very large organs especially for Catholic and Lutheran churches. All of the Pfeffer organs were masterfully built in his shop of 2900 square feet which was attached to his residence at 1006 Marion Street here in St. Louis.

Pfeffer was once described as a man of dependability and trust as well as a devout, exemplary Catholic. After his retirement in 1905, he lived out his days at a residence at 3915 Nebraska Avenue in south S. Louis, and upon his death in 1910, Alfred Kilgen bought the company and operated it under the Pfeffer name until 1919.

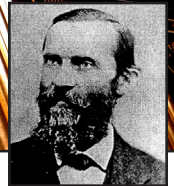
Sometime around 1978, the Shrine's Pfeffer began to show its age. A man named Paul Carton, managed to keep the Pfeffer going for several years and allowed Ralph Ellerbrock, the Shrine's long-time organist, to continue playing it. But there were frequent "warnings" that the organ's lease on life could end. Finally, that day arrived where it was no longer playable. During that time, the Organ Guild Society of St. Louis cited the organ as "an instrument of exceptional historic merit, worthy of preservation." The Society said that with a major overhaul and good maintenance this organ will last a very long time.

It wasn't until the year 1999, after all interior restoration was completed, the Board of Directors turned its attention to the organ's restoration. Martin Ott, a very fine, knowledgeable, and experienced organ technician, was hired to restore the organ. Over the course of two years, the organ was completely dismantled and the 1,895 pipes with 284 made of wood, were meticulously removed, cleaned, catalogued, and placed on the Shrine's balcony. Among other problems, the organ's pipes had become a place where pigeons enjoyed living and making their nests. When all the pipes were put back in their proper place, each pipe was adjusted so that it sounded just right. This was very exacting work and required someone like Ott with years of experience. Upon completion, Mr. Ott commented that "the Shrine's Pfeffer organ is very well designed ... has a fine variety of many different voices, and provides a great listening experience within the wonderful acoustics that the church provides." The final stage of this restoration was to apply 24 carat goldleaf to the exposed pipes thus giving them an extraordinary luminescent appearance. The completely restored Pfeffer organ was re-dedicated by Fr. Valentine in 2001.

Martin Ott's wonderful restoration worked its magic for twenty years. Gradually, the leather on the main reservoir, over time, had become brittle, causing cracks and holes to develop resulting in leaky and diminished air pressure. The reservoir was completely re-leathered to remedy these leaks by Chris Soer, an experienced organ technician. A generous and anonymous donor paid the bill to have this work done which was completed in 2021. Once again, the Pfeffer was playing well.

But, more recently, a motor that drives the air supply was in need of replacement, which required a very lengthy amount of time for the new components to arrive and for it to be installed. After many months of waiting, the new blower installation finally took place last December by Chris Soer. Special accolades go out to Kevin Finazzo and Jim Fesler for removing the old blower unit, and to Joe Finazzo who volunteered to come in on New Year's Eve to do some necessary re-wiring. Our unique pipe organ is now, once again, in top shape and completely playable.

Said Martin Ott, "this Pfeffer organ has a clear, decisive tone, but yet warm sounding." John Walsh, president of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians said that to replace an instrument like the Shrine's Pfeffer would easily take well over a million dollars. It is truly a musical treasure. For an interesting YouTube presentation of this magnificent organ go to: Youtube1890pfefferorgan.



Johann Pfeffer



L-R Kevin Finazzo and Jim Fesler
Removing the old blower system



The new blower system

The Sacredness of the Shrine at Christmas

Christmas is a time at the Shrine that perhaps best reflects upon and reminds all of us of the incredible effort and work it took over these 50 years for our organization, donors, and benefactors to rescue, save, and restore this remarkable Catholic landmark.

The Shrine at Christmas is also a time and place of tranquility, quietness, peace, and joy. Over 20 volunteers came together on the morning of Dec. 8 and fully decorated the sanctuary with 28 lit Christmas trees, garland, poinsettias, along with the nearly life-size nativity scene--and all done in time for two weddings that afternoon.

All of the music for both Christmas Vigil and Christmas Day Masses has to be singularly attributed to the extraordinary and dedicated efforts of Maribeth McMahan, the Shrine's long-time talented cantor and soloist (now music director). She brought in additional musicians whose music filled the entire Shrine with traditional carols and special selections before and during both Masses.

The music along with the visual aura of the decorated sanctuary provided an incomparable setting for celebrating our Lord's Birth beginning with a 5-yr. girl holding the baby Jesus processing up the aisle with Father Wunderlich to the nativity scene and placing Jesus in the manger.



Maribeth McMahan

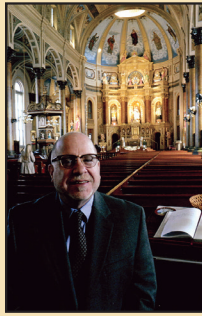
Frank Fessler, Jr.: Long Time Board Member Devoted to the Shrine

In terms of longevity Frank Fessler, Jr. is one of the longest serving members on the Shrine's Board of Directors, having served continuously since 1992. Before that, Frank became an "Associate Member" in 1987 and an "Active Member" in 1990. Currently, Frank is chairman of the by-laws committee. He oversees the written by-laws making sure that they are followed which includes the Board election process as well as the Shrine's operational guidelines.

In 2015, Frank was named secretary to the Board making him a member of the Board's executive committee. Therefore, in addition to his by-laws duties, he has responsibility for accurately recording the minutes of all Board meetings.

Frank has vast knowledge of what it took as well as the continuation to move the Shrine forward to completion. Said Frank, "the Shrine has hundreds of benefactors and donors—we pray that this blessing perdure along with the wonderful, dedicated group of volunteers. If not for these, this monumental effort would not have succeeded."

Frank has deep, abiding reverence and love for the Shrine that began when he and his wife, Julie, were dating. In the summer of 1985 as St. Louis Cardinal fans, they passed the Shrine many times on the way to the ballpark. Reading of the Shrine's history, they decided to attend Mass before the next game. Said Frank, "it truly was a life changing, spiritual event for us. Julie and I fell deeper in love and became engaged the next Easter right before attending Easter Mass at the Shrine. After talking to Fr. Valentine Young, Julie chose Valentine's Day, Feb. 14th, 1987, to be married at the Shrine. The interior of the church was undergoing major restoration at the time. But it was still a magical day."



Frank Fessler, Jr.

Frank and Julie believe fervently that further prayers were answered at the Shrine. In 1991, their son, Frankie, was born with a 3-chamber heart and was immediately transferred to St. Louis Children's Hospital (SLCH). He went through a series of five open heart, cardiovascular reconstructive surgeries—one at 3 days, then at 10 days, 10 months, 2 ½ years, and 6 years of age. Said Julie, "we were at SLCH every day and one or both of us would come to the Shrine to pray for successful surgery and recovery."

When Julie was carrying their second child, they were told that the fetus was suffering the same defect. However, when carried to full term, "Tess" was born with a similar defect, but not as severe. Tess has had 2 surgeries to correct the defects. Both Frankie and Tess were baptized at the Shrine's restored baptismal font by Father Valentine.

Fast forward 32 years. Hopefully Frankie will be on a heart transplant list. Tess is now an intensive care Pediatric Cardiology Nurse at St. Louis Children's Hospital. Said Frank and Julie, "the Shrine of St. Joseph and its altar have been truly for us the Altar of Answered Prayers. We are grateful beyond words. Through the years, we feel the faith and support of our 'Friends' who worship "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam" at the Shrine of St. Joseph.



The Fessler Family
L-R Frankie, Tess, Frank, Jr., Julie

Shrine Chosen as a Site for Various Scenes for New Movie about John O'Leary's Life

On December 8th, a major Hollywood movie producer along with a staff of 80 people with over 100 "extras" descended upon the Shrine to film a wedding scene for the new movie "On Fire". This film is the story of John O'Leary, a native St. Louisan, who, at the age of 9, was burned over 99% of his body from a fire, and was given less than a 1% chance of living. He spent 5 months in the hospital, miraculously lived, went on to St. Louis University, and was married here at the Shrine 20 years ago in 2003. It is O'Leary's wedding scene using the Shrine sanctuary, rectory dining room, and kitchen that the producers re-enacted with major Hollywood actors such as Joel Courtney, William Macy, and John Corbett plus a large additional cast of extras. O'Leary went on to become a professional inspirational speaker. At age 46, he and his wife have four children and live in Webster Groves. He, himself, said "the story is not so much about me—it is about the gratitude for the gift of life. It celebrates what happens when a whole community of people come together to make positive differences."

After years without a major production in St. Louis, this movie about O'Leary should be very inspirational, is due out in the nation's theatres next year, and the Shrine is very honored to have been asked to be part of it. After several hours of filming, we won't know just how much photography of the Shrine will appear in the film until it is released—the Shrine scenes are but a very small part of the film. Nonetheless, it was a first for the Shrine. In the *St. Louis Review* Dec 18-24 issue, was a 4-page layout with color photos of this interesting day of filming at the Shrine.

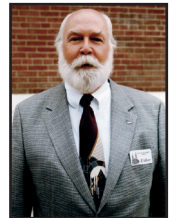
The Holy Spirit at Work

Giving Back—once again, Kathleen Weltzin, a Board member, and her husband, Mike, throughout December coordinated and encouraged the Shrine worship community to make financial gifts to help support the "Women's Night" program which provides homeless women a safe haven for healing and mentoring, and also to the "St. Louis Crisis Nursery" which provides a short-term haven for children whose families face an emergency.

And, during the first week of January, Jim Allen, Shrine's primary docent, arranged to have the Shrine's hours extended to all of those est. 19,000 attending the national FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) SEEK conference the opportunity to walk six blocks to visit and pray at the Shrine during their week at America's Convention Center. It was an inspiring scene to see the various young people at our seasonally decorated magnificent Shrine that week from all parts of the country.

In Memory of Tom Milligan

Tom died at age 84—he was a retired lieutenant colonel in the Air Force and active in many non-profit organizations including the Shrine where he served on the Board of Directors. During his years of volunteering here he actively organized and orchestrated an annual and well-known Veterans Day Mass, played Santa for kids, was treasurer in the Shrine's Men's Club, a long-time usher, and maintained the Shrine's computer system. Donna, his wife, was also extremely active for many years here at the Shrine. Twelve years ago, Tom developed pancreatic cancer—he and Donna, subsequently moved 8 years ago to the east coast to be near their daughter's family where he eventually succumbed to the cancer last October.



Tom Milligan

Weddings 2024-2025

Although wedding reservations are coming in for 2025, there are, however, still openings left for 2024. It is a good idea to get your Shrine wedding date reserved as soon as possible especially if it's for 2024. Please call the Shrine's wedding office at 314 231-0869 or send us an e mail. Our weddings coordinators (Kathie Schmid, JoAnn Geisz, or Karen Fessler) will return your message. To see the Shrine, the wedding office is normally open on Tuesdays if you wish to arrange a visit during the week.

The Tradition Continues...

All are invited to attend **The Feast of St. Joseph**, now in our 180th year, with Knights of Columbus Honor Guard; Blessed Bread given out; special music.

Mark your calendar:
**Tuesday, March 19th,
12 Noon**



Blessed bread given out at last year's Feast of St. Joseph. L-R Margaret McTague, Jim Blum, Denise Finazzo, Donna Finazzo

The Shrine's Trompe l'oeil Painting

Restoration Memoirs by Ted Wofford, Shrine's Long-time Architect

Trompe l'oeil (fooling the eye) painting has existed for centuries, and is simply making a 2-dimensional painting appear to be a 3-dimensional object. In the 1860's and 70's, the Victorians delighted in the art of painting imitations of more costly materials, and the décor of the Shrine of St. Joseph is a textbook example of "what you see, ain't what you think it is" or faux finishes. Fortunately, I began to restore the 1866 Shrine finishes in 1974 which coincided with 29 yrs. of my restoration of the 1870 Missouri Governor's Mansion, and the assembling of an exceptional team of artisans. These craftsmen had the unique knowledge and ability to create the special colors and finishes of that period. Three generations of these talented folks restored the Shrine to its original beauty.

Restoration work is unique in that one must put aside the thinking, taste, and ego of one's own time and enter into the mindset of the designers of another period. This requires research and discipline, as well as endless patience. It also requires skilled hands to actually do the work. Unlike the Governor's Mansion, where no field research was possible, the Shrine has been special in that we had time (because we had little money) to do painstaking controlled paint removal to determine original finishes and design intent. When I first encountered the Shrine, it was painted in carnival colors and the altars had been sprayed with Zolatone, an almost indestructible paint made for school bathrooms. The fun of restoration is the detective work involved as one dissects the building piece by piece and listens carefully to what it has to tell you in order to get back to the basics.

One of my first impressions was that the windows on the plain walls were not properly proportional and must have had originally some element to give them greater dimension. My artisans performed the laborious task of controlled paint removal of the paint around the windows by applying chemicals delicately working through the many layers of paint. When the original painted moldings began to appear they were done in a fragile casein paint that only lasted for a second before dissolving. After days of delicate work, it was possible to document the original line work that framed the windows. It is masterful trompe l'oeil painting, that, with graduated lines of color, creates the effect of 3-dimensional moldings, including shadows. Up close it is lines of color but from a distance it is so convincing that I have watched visitors touch the walls to feel the form of the suggested trims. The windows now related properly with the walls.

Another area of masterful trompe l'oeil painting is the strong cornice above the arches of the nave that is actually flat painting on a tilted board that looks from the floor as a projecting cornice supported by dentil blocks. Again, the trick is in the shadows and skillful highlights. I suggest you try to find other tricks of the eye, since they are everywhere from the domes of the side aisles that took over 40 custom colors to restore, to the balustrades above the sanctuary doors. In addition to the trompe l'oeil painting, the great granite columns are not granite, and the marble altars are not marble.

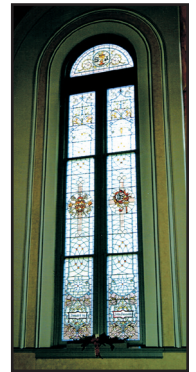
The beauty of the Shrine continues to amaze even me, so I urge the visitor to forget the trickery and simply revel in the wonders that anonymous dedicated artisans originally wrought, and to appreciate the skills of artisans Tom Sater, Buford Heberer, John Pico, and Ed Benson and their helpers, to whom we owe its present magnificence. Unlike most other restoration projects, each new discovery at the Shrine built upon what we had discovered before, and contributed positively to the wonderful sense of unity and peace possessed by the Shrine. This, in itself, is a miracle, so I always feel the presence of the host of unknown artisans whose loving work surrounds me, remember with appreciation those I have known, and simply let the Shrine inspire, uplift and enrich my life. May this sacred space do the same for you!



Section of cornices



A 1985 photo of artisans discovering the trompe l'oeil art around the windows using controlled paint removal



The discovery of the exquisite trompe l'oeil artwork that had been hidden for years was masterfully brought back around each of the windows

Oktoberfest and the Fall Fund Raiser

The surest way to guarantee a great outdoor event is to provide a variety of food and drink with plenty of fellowship and some hand-clapping entertainment -- that's what happened as 160 folks gathered in the courtyard behind the rectory on Oct. 1st for the annual event. Bratwursts and gourmet franks were barbecued; there was several types of chili, delicious baked beans, noodles, cold beverages and a variety of home baked desserts. The Filipino dancers dressed in native costumes shared with us a bit of their culture with some remarkable dancing and other hand clapping talent. Said Sheri Chibnall, event organizer, "I thank all the some 20 volunteers who pitched in and made this a terrific Shrine event."

The Fall fund raiser ended on Nov. 26th. No amount of words could express how deeply we appreciate everyone's participation in these fund raisers, The winners of the raffle this Fall were: 1st place: Bart Angeli, South County, MO; 2nd place: Robert Miller, Chesterfield, MO; 3rd place: Vicky Freker, St. Louis, MO; and 4th place: Carol Rogers. The two fund raisers held during 2023 greatly assisted us in maintaining the Shrine.

Photos by Arteaga

Mae Skubiz: her years of volunteering harken back to a nostalgic time

After well over 32 years, long-time volunteer, Mae Skubiz has resigned due to declining health. She volunteered in the Shrine Shoppe all those years—she was the epitome of dedication. Her involvement harkens back to an era when the Shrine Shoppe (then known as the thrift shop) had a very active and large group of volunteers handling the many gently-used items coming in and being purchased. When Mae began her long, devoted service to the Shrine around 1992 there were as many as seven volunteers on Tuesdays to take care of all the business—it was a very active business operation which brought in much needed funds toward the on-going restoration. On Tuesdays, all of them were treated to a wonderful Italian lunch lovingly prepared by another volunteer--Agnes Renda and others.

But times changed. Prior to and especially during the COVID years, the Shoppe has been run with the dedicated services of Mae, Terry Davis, and Frank Slonicke along with some additional Sunday volunteers such as Tony Caruso and Geraldine Allen after Mass, as well as from Kathleen Weltzin. We also welcomed a new volunteer—Sue Luepker. A wonderful volunteer, Rosalind Anderson, regrettably, died recently.

The Shoppe continues to be a great gathering place for coffee and camaraderie before and after Mass. The enlargement of the Shoppe's religious counter which Terry has organized has many unusual religious items. And then there is a wide variety of newer, gently used clothing, household items, and specialty "one of a kind" type items that have been donated along with some great Ted Wofford Shrine sketches for sale, all at great prices, which still makes it an interesting place to check out.

Mae's family was involved way back in the 1980's when the Shrine restoration was getting underway. Mae and her family members donated funds toward the restoration of statuary but perhaps Mae's fondest statue is the "guardian angel" statue that her family donated to have restored. She truly loved the Shrine and St. Joseph-- giving so many years volunteering before and after every single Mass and on Tuesdays. We abundantly thank her and wish her the best.



Mae Skubiz with Frank Slonicke (left) and Terry Davis (right)



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Check if appropriate:

- My name is misspelled
 - My address is incorrect
 - I received more than one (1) copy
 - I no longer wish to receive the Newsletter
- Please clip the address panel and mail it to us noting your correction or request.*

Mass Times

Sundays: 11:00am

First Friday of each Month: 12:00pm (Noon)

Holy Days of Obligation:

See Website www.shrineofstjoseph.org for details

Veneration of St. Peter Claver Relic or St. Padre Pio Relic following Mass
 Fr. Dale Wunderlich, Rector and Recipient
 of the Aquinas Institute "Great Preacher" Award.

Staying in touch with the Shrine:

www.shrineofstjoseph.org

facebook.com/shrineofstjoseph

[YouTube StJoseph Shrine](https://www.youtube.com/StJosephShrine)

Supporting the Shrine with Your Membership



Sherry Chibnall

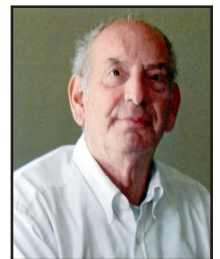
The restoration and ongoing conservation of the Historic Shrine relies on private contributions. **Basic membership** is, and has been since 1980 \$10 per person per year. Should you wish to remain at the \$10 level we appreciate your continued membership.

Companion level: please check the \$20 or more box (per person per year) and include a check for that amount with the form below.

All membership monies go toward the preservation of this irreplaceable historic and religious landmark. For more information please Sherry Chibnall, Membership Chairperson at 314-231-9407

Air & Steam Club

Members of the Air & Steam Club have, for many years, helped to cover utility costs. Your donations have contributed greatly toward the Shrine's heating and AC bills. If you aren't currently a Member, please consider joining now. Your help is needed! There are monthly drawings for prizes totaling \$200. Tickets are \$12 each, and 1 ticket gives you 1 chance to win each month and there's no limit on the number of tickets John Colao you can purchase.



John Colao

Simply complete the form below and mail it together with your check payable to:

"Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc."
 1220 N. 11th Street, St. Louis, MO 63106-4614.

For more information, please contact **John Colao**, Chairperson at (314) 231-9407.

Please Remember the Shrine in your Will or Trust.

Application for Membership & **Renewal Form**
 Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc.
 Dues are \$10 per person, per year

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Check \$ _____ Check Number _____

Date _____ Cash \$ _____

Make checks payable to: Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc.
 1220 N. 11th Street, St. Louis, MO 63106-4614

Special Notice: Please be aware that the Shrine has not and does not give or sell names and addresses on our mailing list to any other groups or organizations.

Air and Steam Club

Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc.
 1220 N. 11th Street, St. Louis, MO 63106-4614

1st Prize \$100
 2nd Prize \$50
 3rd Prize \$50

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Please enter my name. I do not wish to make a donation at this time.