

April 2019



## SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

### *20th Anniversary: Recognizing Jim O'Brien (1929-2015)*

*The late Jim O'Brien will be honored at our annual "Joy & Gratitude" Dinner on June 9th for his Volunteer Service in the early development of Saint Catherine Academy. He will be one of three honorees, including Dian Jennings Mayo (Leadership Award), and Marie and Sal Gilbertie (Partnership Award).*

Grounded in faith and family, and known as a guy who "quietly went about getting things done," Jim O'Brien was one of Saint Catherine Academy's first Board members, motivated by his family that included both a niece and nephew who had special needs. Jim was particularly moved by the challenges that siblings of individuals with disabilities face.

Jim had a lifelong career in the lumber industry, eventually founding his own company in 1977, Nutmeg Forest Products, with his wife Joan. The family business continues to thrive and now includes a third generation of O'Briens. Jim used his building expertise to help steer the construction of our current facility.

Jim coached golf and swimming for Special Olympics, and facilitated getting swimming to the curriculum at the Academy—a weekly activity that continues to this day in both the Academy and Adult Day Program.

Jim grew up in New York, graduated from City College of New York, and was an active parishioner at St. Pius X Church in Fairfield. He and Joan were married for 60 years, and had three children and 10 grandchildren. "Jim was always there for you," said Joan.

"Jim was a gentle soul," commented Helen Burland, Executive Director. "He preferred to make things happen in the background. He had a big heart—which included the



***Mark your calendar to join us on  
Sunday, June 9, to celebrate our  
20th Anniversary "Joy & Gratitude"  
Dinner at Fairfield University!***

***Invitations will be in the mail  
in late April.***

## *The Academy Sports the Green*

You don't have to be Irish to love the Saint Patrick's Day Parade.

Every year, rain or shine, Saint Catherine Academy students put on their green and board buses to downtown Bridgeport, where they march a two-mile route with other organizations and Catholic schools from the Diocese. For those students who need more assistance, a decorated float is waiting for them so that they, too, can enjoy a morning of fun and recognition.

All this transportation is provided by the Parade Committee, which holds fundraisers throughout the year to make it happen. As 2010 Grand Marshall of the parade, the late Bob O'Keefe started coordinating the participation of Catholic schools—a tradition now carried on by the rest of the family. "My father and our family recognized the value of Catholic institutions—our schools and hospitals—to the community, and we wanted this positive influence to be more directly known by people who live here," said Patrick O'Keefe. "The parade was one way to do that. We're proud that Saint Catherine's and so many other schools are involved."

[Click here to see more photos!](#)



## *Off to Work We Go...*

On a recent Monday, Morgan and Ellie headed to the library at Fairfield University, where Jonathan Hodge, Head Librarian Cataloger, greeted them and put them right to work. Their task for the next hour, ongoing each week until completed, is to remove the "Storage" labels which are affixed on many of the books which have been recirculated. The two workers honed in, moving steadily from book to book, row to row.

It is a simple task, but much appreciated. "Ellie and Morgan have been just great—particularly in their conscientious attention to detail. Their work will allow much easier

access to our resources for both faculty and students,” Hodge said. “We’ve been fortunate and honored to have them and Saint Catherine partner with us.”

This work is just one of many vocational partnerships the Center has with local businesses and organizations. [Working in the community](#) has long been an important part of the curriculum at Saint Catherine Academy, and many individuals from the Adult Day Program also have had regular assignments.

After months of coordination with our worksite partners, Brady Cronin, Director of the Adult Program, recently expanded the [vocational program](#) to include ALL participants. “Really, between all the worksites there are tasks that all of our people can help with,” she said. “It’s good to be busy—and so far, everyone is really focused and enjoying the chance to get out there and feel they have purpose.”

[View more photos](#) on the website...



Wishing you  
and your family  
a Blessed Easter!

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