

Submitted by:  
Sue Bowden  
St. Francis Health Care Centre  
Development & Foundation Assistant

### OVER \$360,000 DONATED SINCE 1953

Over the past 54 years, The St. Francis Health Care Foundation has donated more than \$360,000 to the St. Francis Health Care Centre. Much of the money has been raised through the annual Reverse Raffle and, in the first 17 years, The Cadillac Dinner.

The raffle and dinner were started by Sister Stephanie and Tony Szymanowski, of Tony's Bakery. The 1953 event was the first Reverse Raffle in this area.



(1953 Cadillac)

With Vince Miller, owner of Miller Pontiac-Cadillac, a member of the Advisory Board of Directors of St. Francis, the first Cadillac was a donation, a fact confirmed by his son, JR Miller. The value of the car was \$4200. That first Cadillac dinner was held at the Moose Temple, where the Fort Stephenson stands now, according to Bill Yeager. On the menu was prime rib, and everyone paid for their own drinks.

Another interesting fact is that the dinner in those early days was always held on a Tuesday night because Tony's Bakery was closed on Wednesdays. That speaks to the dedication of Tony Szymanowski in running the event.

Clem Szymanowski, Tony's son started to help after the second year. Clem's daughter Ruth, remembers, "Grandpa worked so hard on this event that he checked himself into the hotel there for one week before the event and then checked out when it was over." That's dedication!



(Clem Szymanowski)

Clem was on the board at St. Francis until 1990. During that time he was the chairman and Master of Ceremonies a few years. He was mostly in charge of all the food. He remembers the events also being held at The American Legion and now at Ole Zim's. His father started this with the Sisters and on the second year Tony and Francis Szymanowski asked their son Clem to host a cocktail party before the event in their home. There were approximately 50 people invited including politicians, business owners, friend and family. Clem's daughter Marlene remembers the furniture having to be moved to accommodate all of the guests. His daughter Ruth told me how all the ladies wore beautiful dresses and the men were in suit and ties. The ladies would have shopped at Joseph's, Schmidt's, Bintz's and The Fashion in Fremont. Some even went as far as Toledo to find that perfect dress, After all this was the event of the year. Ruth also had the honor one year of pulling each ball from the hopper with the names of all who had bought a ticket.

Clem also remembered that Whirlpool Corporation was a great sponsor. They gave their first washer in 1965. Ruth remembers this because she bought the washer from whoever won it that year.

I spoke with Bea Fox, who has never missed a raffle, "I never won the Cadillac and I never won any of the beautiful geraniums that were always the center pieces in all theses years, but I did win \$500 a few years back." She too, said, "It was the social event of the year." She remembers that Ellen Chudzinski won two Cadillac's along with a gentleman from Norwalk.

Ellen Chudzinski's grandson Mark said, "Grandma won in 1963 and again in 1970. Her granddaughter Karen O'Neil said, "I remember grandma buying tickets for all her children and in 1970 they pulled her son Vince's name and grandma kept the Cadillac. The value was \$5300.00

Dick Smith of The Fremont Company said, “I remember I was in high school and I worked at Miller Pontiac-Cadillac and my job was to wax and buff the Cadillac and take it to The American legion the day of the event.”

There have been many wonderful memories over the years; unfortunately no one can remember who won the first Cadillac. If you have any information on this or any other old stories or photos you would like to share, you can call Sue Bowden at 419-639-6226 or email me at [sbowden@sfhcc.org](mailto:sbowden@sfhcc.org). There is still time for you to win \$6000 in this year’s raffle, just call 419-639-6226.

I would like to take this time to say Thank You on behalf of everyone here at St. Francis Health Care Center to all the wonderful volunteers over the years and to all the generous people who help make St. Francis a better place to be.

I would like to end this story with a poem that I found that was written by Rev. William J. Cotter and it was dedicated to Sister Stephanie.



(Sister Stephanie)

### ***The Sacred Trail***

She walked along “The Sacred Trail”  
The breeze fanned her “Sacred Veil”  
She helped the sick, the lame and blind  
She looked for more whom she could find.  
She brought them to her “Nursing Home”  
And there they lived...no more alone.  
The Lord shall bless this “Precious Soul”  
And all the helpers in “The Fold.”