

# Life in LAMORINDA

## The Lasallian Spirit in Action at Saint Mary's College

By Linda U. Foley



Billie Jones (right) President of SMC Guild at Orinda Country Club Christmas luncheon (with Guild member Angie Veio)

Saint John Baptist De La Salle—whose precepts are the basis of Saint Mary's College—would be proud of the Saint Mary's Women's Guild whose mission is to raise scholarship funds to aid needy students.

De La Salle, born in Reims France in 1651, founded the Institute of the Christian Brothers, a teaching order whose tenet is to teach and provide affordable education to all within the framework of a Catholic education. De La Salle dedicated him-

self completely to the education of young people, particularly the poor and needy. He was canonized in 1900 and proclaimed Patron of Christian Teachers in 1950. For more than 300 years, the Brothers have perpetuated the Lasallian teachings throughout the world.

In many ways, the Women's Guild has assumed this dedication—committing itself to helping worthy students who need financial support—through various scholarship funding. The Guild—composed of alumni, College affiliates and friends of the College—was founded in 1939. Since its inception, the Guild has diligently focused on raising funds to aid thousands of students to achieve their academic goals and objectives.

The Guild has a current membership of 160 members who adheres to a busy schedule throughout the academic year. The standing calendar includes a spaghetti dinner, Bridge and Bunco, Christmas boutique and Annual Spring Fashion Show at the College campus, and the Christmas luncheon, usually off-site. In addition, upcoming events (such as bus outings to San Francisco or Napa) and newsworthy items are parlayed through monthly newsletters.

The monies raised by the Guild are funneled into The Saint Mary's College Guild Annual Scholarship Fund and the Brother Albert Plotz Memorial Endowed Scholarship Fund whose current market value has generated in excess of \$42,000 for this year, providing direct funding to needy and worthy students.

This year's fashion show "Swing into Spring" will be held on April 12th; fashions provided by Coldwater Creek. For more information, call Mary Power at 925-672-6761.

Membership to the Saint Mary's College Guild is available to everyone and one need not be College affiliated. For membership information, contact Patricia O'Connell at 376-4096 or Patricia McEnaney at 376-3306. The College website is www.stmarys-ca.edu. The Guild's website is under construction.

*Editor's Note: Rumor has it that Linda U. Foley herself will be among the fabulous models in the April 12th Fashion Show!*

## Buddha's Gate Open in Lafayette

By Andrea A. Firth



Buddha Gate Monastery in Lafayette

Photos provided

Tucked away in the northeast corner of Lafayette on several acres of hilltop land is the Buddha Gate Monastery—a retreat for local Buddhists and those new to Buddhism. Many residents of Lamorinda are unaware of this religious community, but its location is no secret. A sign for the Buddha Gate Monastery is displayed prominently on Taylor Boulevard across from the turn at Withers Avenue, and additional signs lead one through the winding roads of a residential neighborhood to the entrance to Buddha Gate off Gloria Terrace.

In fact, the all female group of Buddhist Masters who reside at the Monastery are delighted to receive both the experienced and novice Buddhist. "The purpose [of the Monastery] is to provide a place for people to access and approach Buddhism easily," states Master Jian-Sheng, the Abbess of Buddha Gate Monastery.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, approximately 0.7% of adult Americans identify themselves as Buddhists—a statistic

that includes several groups such as Zen, Tibetan, and others. Almost half of the Buddhists in the United States reside in the West, and the number of individuals affiliated with the Buddhist tradition in California approaches 2% of the adult population. The monthly ceremony held at Buddha Gate is attended by up to 120 people, and the regular membership consists of approximately 100 individuals.

Buddha Gate Monastery officially opened its doors in October of 2000. The area was first owned and developed by a Catholic Church over 50 years ago who then sold part of the land for residential development. The remainder served as the location of another Buddhist organization for about 10 years prior to the arrival of Buddha Gate.

Ten Buddhist nuns along with a few lay Buddhist women live and work at the Monastery. The nuns or Masters all originate from the Chung Tai Chan Monastery, the parent-monastery in Taiwan. Each has extensive training in the practice of Zen Buddhism promoted by the

Grand Master Wei Chueh.

The gates of the Monastery open at 8:30 each morning and members and guests are invited to participate in classes on Buddhism and meditation conducted in both English and Chinese. In addition to the Sunday morning ceremony held each month, the Buddha Gate holds half-day and full day Zen Retreats. "We hope to create an environment for reflection," states Master Jian-Sheng, "and we hope that people can immerse themselves in the environment."

For those interested to learn more about Buddhism and new to the practice, Master Jian Sheng suggests attending the Beginner Meditation classes currently held on Thursday evenings from 7:30 to 9:30 pm. There is even a Saturday morning meditation class for children who range in age from three to 15 years of age. Master Jian-Sheng smiles broadly and notes that meditation with a three-year old presents an interesting challenge. Call to inquire or register (925) 934-2411.

## Trifecta – Orinda Resident Works in Lafayette & Worships in Moraga

By Jean Follmer



Dot Feist, Orinda

Photo Jean Follmer

Orinda resident Dot Feist grew up in an Irish Catholic home in Brooklyn, New York. She eventually began working in Manhattan and found the atmosphere "so intense, I walked to the beach each night" to relax. One of five girls, Dot and her best friend went to visit Dot's sister in Laguna Beach, California. They loved the Southern California beaches even more than those in New York and soon moved to Laguna Beach together.

Not long after moving to Southern California, Dot met Jim Feist at a jazz event at The White House Restaurant & Nightclub in Laguna Beach. Jim grew up in Montclair Village in Oakland and was in Southern California visiting friends. Jim returned to Montclair, but the distance couldn't keep them apart and it didn't take long for Jim to propose marriage to Dot. He said "I'd rather call you my wife than my girlfriend." Jim's family was from Sweden and he married Dot two years later in the Swedish community of Svedahl in Salinas. They had a big turnout at the wedding with Jim's relatives flying in from Sweden and Dot's from New York. Dot said "Most of my family came out – lots of Irish firefighters."

After they married, the Feists moved to Albany and then to Hayward. They had two children – a son, Jack and a daughter, Dawn. Jim owned

B.J. Supply Company in San Francisco and Dot stayed home with the children during their first few years. Eventually Dot "went to work part-time. I didn't want to work (away from home) full-time, so I opened a daycare and ran it for about six years." Dot was "the room parent at the Hayward school and I became very involved with schools." They weren't happy with the direction of the Hayward schools, so they decided to move to Orinda in 1993. Dawn entered Glorietta Elementary and Jack entered Orinda Intermediate School. On the move to Orinda, Dot says it was "a wonderful change, a most positive experience." She shuttled her children to Scouts and sports and the family loved to ski and sail together. She again became involved in the schools working in Alameda as a teacher, at Glorietta in the after care program and then helped open Joyful Beginnings Preschool in Lafayette in 1995 as its Director. Life was good until 1996 when Jim was diagnosed with leukemia. Jim battled his disease, but it got the best of him and Jim died that October. "Dawn was about to turn 12 when Jim died, so I was basically a single parent. I focused on my children and my work. After Jim passed, the community was unbelievable, they were so supportive." Each year, Dot volunteers for Light the Night. Last year, she and

Dawn went to San Diego for the marathon. Dot ran the 1/2 marathon and Dawn ran the full.

Dot attends mass at St. Monica's in Moraga. She says "I used to teach CCD – I go there on a regular basis. I love my pastor, he speaks to my heart." Dot has also been going to Glide Memorial in San Francisco for over 20 years. She goes there every Easter to help feed the homeless.

She is still the Director at Joyful Beginnings. She was hired by Ginny Leavitt in 1995 and says "I couldn't have done it without Ginny". She stresses how supportive Ginny and Pastor Lori Sawdon have been to her and to the preschool. Dot is very proud of the Joyful Beginnings program and attributes its success to her staff and the loving environment they create for the children. She describes it as a "creative curriculum in which you use the whole environment to teach the children. My focus is that you give children a strong sense of self-esteem and help them develop social skills. If they've mastered that by the time they leave (for kindergarten), it enhances their critical thinking skills and helps them think outside the box. I encourage children and let them have freedom and choice." The Joyful Beginnings program is enhanced by yoga classes, visits from Pastor Lori, Lafayette Library visits, cooking and field trips throughout the year.

As for the future, Dot says "I'll definitely be here for awhile. I'll always be in this field and I plan to spend more time with my parents. Her sister recently moved to Orinda and Dot helped her start a toddler program at Lafayette Christian Church called Creekside Toddlers. Her son is currently working in the area and her daughter is finishing her nursing degree. Dot believes she is "truly blessed, I love my life and I'm really grateful for the community I have here."

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