

U.S. Cabinet member visits Lemont, St. James

Something rare happened last week: a person of very high authority came to Lemont. How high of authority was this person? Try the United States Secretary of the Interior.

Manuel Lujan came to Lemont last Wednesday to visit the St. James Church, located on Rt. 83, in the farthest reaches of the Village of Faith. He came as part of a tour he took of the Heritage Corridor.

"The Canal Corridor Association planned his visit," says Eileen D'Angelo, a member of the St. James preservation society. "He's very interested in the Heritage Corridor, and he's particularly interested in our group because we've had a great deal of outside support." The group is dedicated to preserving and renovating the church. It was formed in the wake of last year's tornado, which did substantial damage to the structure, and tore down many of the trees in the surrounding cemetery.

"He really enjoyed his visit," says D'Angelo. "It actually stopped raining for a while, and the sun managed to come out. We showed him some of the old Irish tombstones with the stories on them. He found it all very interesting."

D'Angelo says Lujan was impressed with the amount of work her group has done to help preserve the church, one of the oldest in the state. "We were thrilled to have him here," she says, "because it

gives us another chance to show our supporters that this church is of national significance, historically."

So far, the society has held a number of fundraisers, which D'Angelo says have helped pay for the planning stages of the restoration. "We've also been able to secure a couple of grants," she says. One of those was a \$2,000 grant donated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

"Right now our architect is continuing work on the plans," she says. "And we are going to replace the front doors as an initial project. They will be hand-crafted by a local company which does just that type of work. Those should be in place by Mother's Day."

Another plan in the works will involve some planting, to replenish the trees which were torn down by last year's tornado. "And we've got one of the oldest Elm trees in the state right behind the church," says D'Angelo. "Somehow it managed to survive the tornado, the drought, and Dutch Elm disease."

For those who are interested, the society is planning a tour of the grounds for the Sunday of the Memorial Day weekend. "We also have a couple people working on putting together some information about the church and the cemetery."

Still, a great deal of work, and fundraising, needs to be done before the church is completely restored.



Preservationists

Manuel Lujan, the United States Secretary of the Interior, (center) visited St. James Church last week on a whirlwind tour of the Heritage Corridor. On his left are Michael Foran, vice president of the St. James preservation society, and congressman Harris Fawell. On his right are Eileen D'Angelo, president of the society, and Fr. James Davitt, church pastor.