

Philadelphia church found couple continues adventurous life

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA, Miss. — She's an award-winning artist, a free spirit of sorts. He's a renowned storyteller with an unimpeachable memory.

Together they have led interesting and extraordinary lives, helping establish an Episcopal church in Philadelphia and publicly opposing racism during the turbulent 1960s.

Millie and Boots Howell have been married for more than 50 years, raising four children who have each excelled in some literary or artistic form.

A Meridian native, one of Millie Howell's paintings graces the Meridian Museum of Art's 2006 commemorative T-shirt. It was unveiled at the

annual gala in December, much to her family's delight.

She started her painting career 55 years ago at the original Mississippi Art Colony in Canton.

Howell, a Neshoba County native and a general contractor at McLain Plumbing in Philadelphia, is often asked to share recollections of historical events for small gatherings of friends.

He is known for his impersonation of former Neshoba County Fair Association President Jim Hillman.

In recent years, he's entertained fairgoers as "Mr. Hillman" during Hometown Proud day as well as at numerous cabin parties.

Also at the fair, Boots Howell and his brother Ray have played the trumpet at what began as an impromptu jazz

festival in Happy Hollow.

It was during the summer of 1962 that the Howells invited an Episcopal priest, Jim McKeown, and several lay leaders from Meridian here to provide assistance to a small group of people seeking to establish a church in Philadelphia.

The Howells had married in an Episcopal church in Oxford and "just loved everything about it," they said.

They, along with Dr. and Mrs. Pete Rhymes, Lisette Phillips, Harriet DeWeese and Virginia Moore, met with Rev. McKeown in their home and later established St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church on a street which today bears its name.

Episcopal services were held in the Benwalt Hotel while the new church was

under construction.

Millie Howell and Harriet DeWeese designed St. Francis' stain glass windows depicting things of nature that were connected to the church's namesake.

The first service was held in the church on March 29, 1964.

A major renovation was recently completed and it remains today, the only Episcopal church in Philadelphia.

It was during that same period in Neshoba County's history that the Howells took a public stance against the murders of three young civil rights workers who came

here to help register blacks to vote.

Seeing the streets of Philadelphia overflowing with worldwide media last summer during the trial of the man many believe was the mastermind behind the murders took the couple back to 1964 when the setting was

Helping homeless draws girls of different faiths closer

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never knew about themselves.

"Project Provide A Home" was launched by the Palisades Emergency Residence Corporation, a 40-bed shelter for single, homeless people. It planned to open a shelter next door for families, and was looking for help.

The shelter hosted a group of Jewish volunteers one week, and another group of Muslims shortly afterward. The symbolism—and the possibilities—were not lost on the executive director, Matt Kamin, a Jew, and Amal Abdallah, a Palestinian who helps line up volunteers to serve meals.

"We were trying to figure out why our communities didn't get along," Kamin said. "We started talking and said, 'Why can't we get these two groups together and do something?' It was that easy."

They put out the word to local synagogues, mosques and religious schools, seeking young girls to work on the family shelter. Added bonuses included meeting people of other faiths, learning about each other, and helping the less fortunate.

The first meeting was somewhat awkward, with all the Jewish girls sitting on one side, and all the Muslim girls sitting on the other, each side eyeing the other curiously, if not warily.

"One of the girls asked me, 'How do you pray?' and I was so surprised at the question," said Aviva Bannerman, a 17-year-old from Montclair. "I thought everybody knew that

Jews pray in groups and we sing our songs aloud, but no one had ever taught her that. I asked her how she prayed, and they use a prayer mat and their more subdued and quiet. I go to a Jewish school and I'm surrounded by Jews 24/7, so I was delighted to be able to share about my religion and share in theirs."

Nour Singer, 17, from Fort Lee, was just as surprised at what she found in her Jewish counterparts.

"I had expected them to be the type that wore long skirts and hats, but I soon learned that there were different types of Jews," she wrote in an essay describing her experience in the program, adding she learned that Muslims and Jews share many of the same practices, including eating religiously prepared food.

The girls quickly found themselves focusing on similarities, not differences like the centuries-old dispute between the two peoples over land in the Middle East. The one and only rule for the program: No talking politics.

"That was a rule we agreed on coming into this project, and I'm glad it exists," wrote Liliane Winograd, a 17-year-old West Orange resident. "As much as I am interested in seeing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from another perspective, I like that we are able to talk comfortably without the possibility of an argument breaking out."

Or as Rebecca Heller, 16, of Cranford added, "We could all just sit together, eating pizza and laughing, without a thought to our feuding ances-

tors or political tensions."

They got down to work, forming committees: one to cook food, one to raise money, another to help publicize the fundraising dinner. So far, the girls have raised about \$12,000 for the family shelter that's set to open next door to the existing facility next spring.

The dinner itself extended the intermingling to the girls' parents and guests.

"The tables were completely integrated soon after everyone got there, and that happened totally on its own," said Annie Rose London, 16, from Hoboken. "Everyone was talking to each other, these people who had never been encouraged to talk to each other before and the parents were saying how proud they were of their kids. It was so cool to see all these new connections being made."

There's already a waiting list of volunteers to serve on the next interfaith project at a homeless shelter in Englewood starting in February, Kamin said.

"I made new friends and was able to interact with other people and do something good for society," said 14-year-old Rana Abdallah of Lyndhurst, whose mother helps run the program. "It's easier for us to do this because we're younger and listen to each other more."

Bishop criticizes all birth control as evil

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ods are virtually nonexistent. She said arguments that the pill use can induce abortions and inhibit pregnancy long after the use has been discontinued are faulty.

The American Academy of Family Physicians has said that when couples are diligent, natural family planning is 90 percent to 98 percent effective, a rate comparable to the pill. It added, however, that it appears to be less effective in actual practice.

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