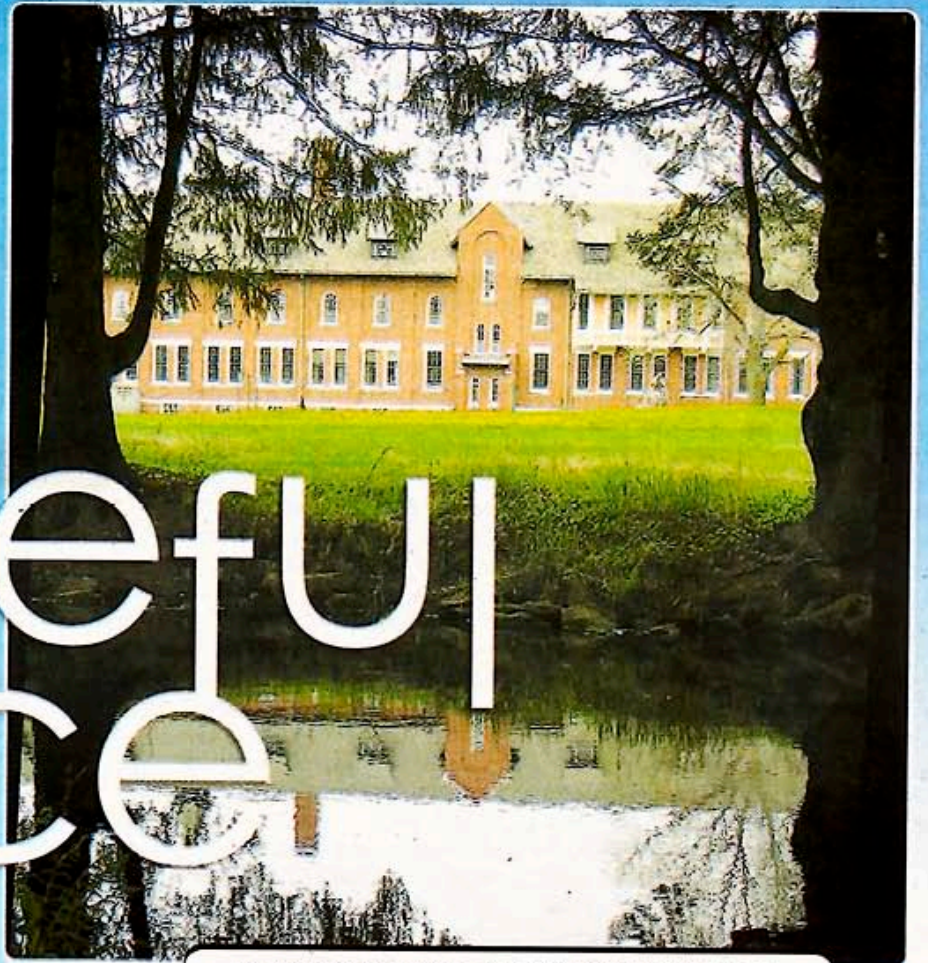
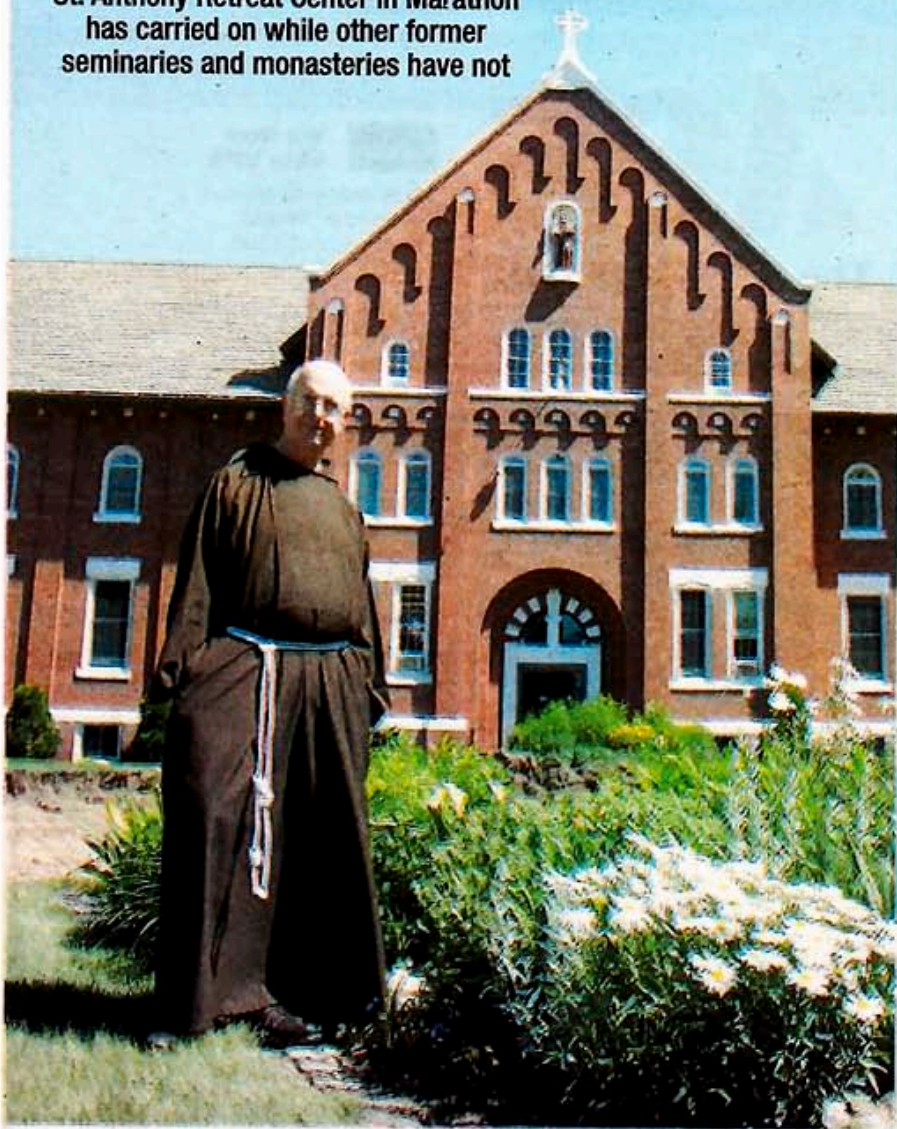


Peaceful places



Considered a jewel of Central Wisconsin, St. Anthony Retreat Center in Marathon has carried on while other former seminaries and monasteries have not



Local foundations in Wausau have given generously to maintain St. Anthony's. The Alexander Foundation itself provided \$150,000 of the \$700,000 the center raised for a building rehab project

This, happily, isn't one of those heart-rending stories about a treasured local asset about to go belly up if supporters can't raise \$100,000 by the end of the month. Rather, St. Anthony Retreat Center is faring much better than other historic edifices that have been converted into commercial ventures.

It's not that the Capuchin Franciscan friars running this former seminary don't have a worry in the world. And while this treasured asset in the village of Marathon isn't all that well known, even by people who live in the Wausau area, it has been able to carry on, open to the public, with hopes of serving more.

Fr. Dan Crosby is the center's eloquent, brown-robed spokesman. Those who spend time here, he says, find that St. Anthony "speaks to their spirit in a way that almost nothing else in this area does. People need spots that nourish the spirit as well as the body — those safe havens that bring peace, renewal and rejuvenations."

Few would argue that St. Anthony's is the most beautiful place in the area. Situated on the eastern edge of the village, the imposing but graceful stone and brick building built in 1917 sits on 45 acres along the Rib River. There are long, arched corridors, original hardwood floors and shutters. You enter a drive lined by stone fences on either side. Two tall stories of red brick give the center a "this could have been a seminary" look. That's because it was a Capuchin seminary from 1917 until 1970.

Today this marvelous, serene place feels

comfortable and comforting to people of all walks of life and beliefs, from devout Catholics to those who are skeptical of any organized religion.

The Capuchin order welcomes quiet groups who come with the goal of spiritual or human growth. The center is operated independently of the La Crosse diocese of the Catholic Church, but with the bishop's permission. Crosby says retreatants don't need to be Catholic or even Christian, "But you have to be concerned about being more human."

Buddhist groups come at least once in a year and often spend an entire eight-day retreat in silence. Crosby says it's uncanny. When center staff meet them in a hallway, they not only maintain silence, but avert their eyes, as well.

Being open to people with other belief systems is fine with Joan Wilichowski, for 39 years the center's secretary. Living a mile away in the village of Marathon, she likes that she has a job "that helps people come closer to God, whatever God is for them." She has heard many of the same comments Crosby remembers, that after people come to the center once, they want to return. "I think this is a special place. Often people step into the office when they're registering and say, 'I'm home.' It is a place of peace and serenity."

All religious orders saw an increase in vocations after World War II. Enrollment grew so much in the 1950s, Crosby says, that the Capuchins built an addition to house what had become a total of 110

student friars, priest friars and lay brothers. St. Anthony's was founded in 1917 by the Capuchin order (which always has maintained ownership) as a place where the students could be removed from population centers where there was, at the time, a serious threat of tuberculosis.

But eventually the seminary function was moved to a large city. In the 1960s, after enrollment peaked in mid-decade, the number of seminary students plummeted to the point that by 1970 the facility was converted into a retreat center. The remaining seminarians transferred to a diocesan seminary in Milwaukee. "Every religious institution experienced a decline, everybody," Crosby says. "Things were never the same."

But the order doesn't consider operating the facility as a retreat center as a lesser function, he says. "We're Franciscans, not monks. St. Francis always wanted to be among the people."

The Capuchin priests are a religious order. Diocesan priests, like the ones serving area Catholic churches, are not. If the priests at St. Anthony's were to stray from Catholic teachings, the bishop would investigate, but Crosby says, "The bishop trusts us and does not interfere."

They're doing something right, because St. Anthony's continues to attract people and organizations, providing the necessary income to keep the sacred place functioning and not falling into disrepair. Crosby and his staff arrange regular retreats open to the community, for couples, holiday reflection, grieving, meditation and wide variety of other topics.

In 2007, Mary Roberts of Wausau organized a fundraiser there called the Inspiring Spirits Gala. It was a dramatic, visually stunning affair set in and around the historic structure: a ballet at dusk in the courtyard; a simple supper on the original oak tables from 1917; inspirational readings

COVER FEATURE

A Capuchin, you say?

Trying to understand the relationship of the Capuchin order within the larger Catholic Church sent us to the Modern Catholic Dictionary:

- Capuchins are one of three autonomous branches of the Franciscans. All Franciscans go further than diocesan priests and take a vow of poverty as well as vows of celibacy and obedience to God. The Capuchin order was founded in the early 1500s. The Capuchins at St. Anthony Retreat Center wear a capuche, or habit, of brown fabric. Sandals and beard are optional.
- Brothers are "men religious," followers who choose a life within a religious community, but might never enter the priesthood.
- Friars are brothers. The term usually refers to the Franciscans or Dominicans. Friars pursue a ministry that reaches outside the monastery. Monks usually do their labor and prayer inside the monastery.
- Franciscans trace their origin to St. Francis of Assisi. Friars originally were to own no property and earn their livelihood through manual labor or begging. Of the three orders of Franciscans, the Capuchins put the most emphasis on poverty and austerity.
- A priest is an authorized mediator from the people to God, unlike a prophet, who mediates from God to the people. Priests are the men who offer the body and blood of Christ during Mass. Another priestly power is to forgive sin.
- Fr. Dan Crosby of St. Anthony's Retreat Center is a Capuchin, a brother and a priest.



"Often people step into the office when they're registering and say, 'I'm home.' It is a place of peace and serenity."

❖ continued from 13

and a choral presentation featuring the Mad Regals. At the time, she expressed a desire to expose more people to the place and inspire them to see it as a precious resource with much potential. "I love the place in terms of its peacefulness. It is an architectural treasure."

Crosby, 72 and the center director for 11 years now, also has a deep appreciation for the building and grounds (if he had not entered religious life, he would have wanted to study architecture, he says). He knows it would be wrong, for example, to slap a coat of paint on the worn concrete interior hallways that flank the courtyard. Every time he walks them, he senses the thousands who have trod there over the decades.

Others — including the Alexander Foundation and Dudley Foundation of Wausau — share in a belief that the center is doing something of value. By itself, the Alexander Foundation gave \$150,000 of the \$700,000 the center raised without the benefit of a professional consultant for a rehab project to replace windows and put on the first new roof in 85 years, replacing slate with metal shingles.

"That was God, helping us and people," Crosby says. "Examples like that deepen our conviction that this is a good place, a sacred place worth continuing."

The fate of facilities like St. Anthony's that no longer serve their original purpose isn't always rosey. Often struggling to keep going at all, some have been commercialized into large-scale bed and breakfast operations.

Crosby says it's rare for a retreat center to even squeak by. He still wants to boost user numbers at St. Anthony's somewhat, but support has been adequate. "It's because people believe in us."

A group of supporters quietly have maintained awareness and support with networking

and fundraisers, like a recent one to update the retreat center's guest room furnishings.

Up to 80 people can stay overnight. There's one housekeeper and a group of volunteers comes in to clean up after every retreat. It's "a wonderful thing to see and feel the ownership," Crosby says. This place belongs to (the volunteers) in a very real sense. We could not be here without them. To see the love of people who come here week after week is humbling."

Most of what happens at St. Anthony Retreat Center is quiet. Crosby says, "We need time to reflect, not just get input and chatter about it."

People can visit the grounds most any time of day. They can walk the labyrinth that has its own set of volunteer caretakers, visit the small cemetery near the river or walk the footpaths along the pond. There are quiet places, benches, a gazebo and screened house. To see the interior, visitors are asked to call to make arrangements.

Residents in the immediate area know the center grounds provide a place to get away, even for a short time, says John Small, Marathon village president. "It's a little treasure sitting there," he says, "It's a retreat. It gets you out of the hustle and bustle of everyday life."

The national group that used to be called Elder Hostel has discovered the center and has its second retreat booked there in August. Briefly called Exploritas, the group now calls itself Road Scholars and information is available at roadscholar.org. Information on the center and its history is at sarcenter.com.

Crosby is encouraged. "We are not closing at all," he says. There's a deep awareness that people need a place like the St. Anthony Retreat Center. "It's a haven, St. Anthony's and its 45 acres. We intend to be around for the future." **CP**

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Holiday deadline

The deadline for this column is 7 p.m. Thursday, July 1, for the Thursday, July 8, column.

Farmers market

Dousman farmers market, 2 to 6 p.m. Wednesday, July 7, at the Dousman Community Center, 235 N. Main St., Dousman. Fresh strawberries, raspberries and peas available along with bakery and crafts and farm-raised meats and eggs.

Look on Facebook as Dousmanmarket Dousman, visit www.dousmanchamber.org/farmers_market.html or e-mail Virginia Scholtz at vscholtz@scholtzsite.com for information.

Senior vouchers

The farmers market is participating in the Community Action Coalition's Food Security Program. Mary Peschel, outreach and program specialist, will be at the Dousman farmers market Wednesday, July 7, to help low-income seniors so they can receive vouchers worth \$25. The vouchers can be used like cash to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables during the 2010 season.

Plan Commission

The Plan Commission will

meet at 7:15 p.m. Wednesday, July 7, at the Municipal Building, 118 S. Main St., Dousman.

KMRA flag football

Registration for KMRA flag football is still open for the fall season. Open to kindergarten through fifth-graders. Cost: Dousman, Ottawa and Summit residents, \$100; nonresidents, \$115; includes a T-shirt. Go to www.kmrec.com and download the registration and waiver and send forms and money to P.O. Box 120, Dousman. For information, contact football coordinator Gerrit Gronowski, (262) 490-5651 or G3builders@yahoo.com.

Dousman area rummage

Dousman area rummage sale, sponsored by the Dousman Area Chamber of Commerce is Saturday, Aug. 28.

St. Bruno Parish

Volunteers are needed to help out this summer as Kurt Hendrick is on his own. Cleaners, weeders and painters are needed. If interested, call the parish office and leave your name and number, and Hendrick will give you a call.

Help feed the homeless on the lakefront on Thursday,

July 22. St. Ben's Community Meal receives a donation of 2 pounds of food from Usinger's for every person who participates in the Bill Michael 5K. Run-2M Walk. Walk, run, or push a stroller. Participants can register online or print off a copy of the registration at www.stbensmilwaukee.org/germanfest.

Thursday, July 1: 9 to 11 a.m., prayer shawl ministry in the Gathering Place; 9 a.m. to noon, Sportslife camp.

Friday, July 2: 9 a.m. to noon, Sportslife camp.

Sunday, July 4: 5 p.m., Spanish/Bilingual Mass.

First Presbyterian Church

Communion, 9:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday, July 4. Prayer group meeting, 9 a.m. Monday, July 5. Call (262) 965-3268 for information.

Emmanuel UCC

The 9 a.m. Sunday, July 4, worship will have trumpets and the theme "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory." There will be iced tea and snacks after worship.

Visit www.seeyouonsunday.com for information. The church office, 36821 Sunset Drive, just west of Highways 67 and 18, is open from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday.