

## Mill City's century-old church reborn

St. Catherine of Siena parishioners to celebrate centennial this weekend

BY DENISE RUTTAN, Statesman Journal

MILL CITY — As the cycles of the timber industry have come and gone in Mill City, one church has stood at the heart of the town during a century of change.

Now parishioners at St. Catherine of Siena, the Catholic mission in Mill City, are getting ready to celebrate the church's centennial.

Events are set for all day Saturday and Sunday at the church at First and Ivy in downtown Mill City. Free concerts, ice cream socials, church tours, food and live entertainment are planned.

The church was built in 1910 and dedicated in 1911.

Contractor Mike Adams Construction Co. of Stayton is busy putting finishing touches on the project before the celebration.

Mill City was founded in 1887 as a lumber town

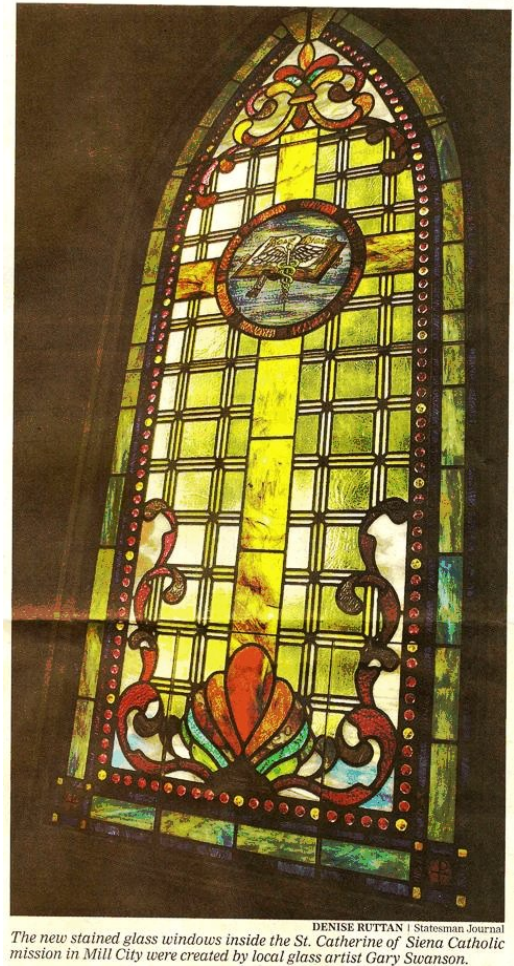
In the early 1900s, the town thrived with Czech, German and other immigrants who worked in the mills. In April 1910, the first St. Anthony Chapel rail car visited Mill City on the Corvallis & Eastern Railroad. The Rev. Arthur Lane of Albany opened a chapel [rail] car mission for monthly services.

Parishioners got together to build the mission. They had help from the Catholic Extension Society.

In 1911, more than 200,000 boards of Douglas fir were being cut in Mill City every day by workers who made 20 cents per hour.

In 1948, Mill City's dam was built and the church building was beginning to show signs of wear. The dam workers, who attended Mass at St. Catherine, built buttresses to reinforce the sagging walls of the church, which was starting to lean.

Lynda Harrington, who moved to Mill City from the Portland area six years ago, recalls seeing



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the little church for the first time. It was leaning and faded by decades of history.

The new stained glass windows inside the St. Catherine of Siena Catholic mission in Mill City were created by local glass artist Gary Swanson.

“I said to my husband, I’m glad there’s a Catholic church here.” ... I know you shouldn’t care about the physical place, but it was very rundown,” Harrington said.

But then she got to know the people and became involved in the community.

Parishioner John Gottfried moved to Mill City from Salem nine years ago.

“When you entered the church, it didn’t feel like you were coming into a church. It felt like coming into an old building on its last legs,” Gottfried said.

But Gottfried has special ties to the mission. When he lived in Veneta, he attended another Catholic church named St. Catherine of Siena.

“It’s kind of like a home-coming,” Gottfried said.

Fundraising for renovating the church started in 2004, and work began in 2006.

The fund drive finished just before the economy declined and the Portland Archdiocese filed for bankruptcy. If community members had started the project any later, the parish was small enough that Mill City might have lost its only Catholic church.

“If the timing hadn’t worked out, it might not have happened,” Gottfried said, but now the church likely will stand for another 100 years.

The project cost \$450,000.

“We raised almost a half-million dollars in this little community in 18 months,” Harrington said.

Frank Lumber Co. and Freres Lumber Co. led the fundraising as the first key donors.

“There’s been an awful lot of people involved. We wouldn’t have been able to get this done without everyone’s efforts,” Harrington said.

Harrington said the project has brought out an ecumenical spirit among the churches in town.

(For a schedule of events for the church’s celebration, see this story at [StatesmanJournal.com](http://StatesmanJournal.com))

During the celebration, pastors and representatives from seven Protestant churches in the Santiam Canyon will climb the narrow steps to the bell tower and take turns ringing the 100-year-old bell.

The work stripped away the blue wallpaper that hid the tongue-and-groove fir walls of the original church. Stained glass windows produced by local glass artist Gary Swanson shine from the white walls. Now the whole canyon will be able to see the church glowing as the pride of its parish on July 4 weekend.

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