

As co-founder of Niagara Heritage of Hope and Service, I am often asked how I got involved. The answer to that question goes back to my childhood. For as long as I can remember, I have always helped in some way ... my dad with my Babci, my mom with my Babcia, my nephews and then me with my mom. Caring for others just came naturally to me. After my mom passed in 2008, I found myself in a precarious situation - my role as a caregiver stopped and I had no one other than myself to look after.

It was around that same time that I learned that the parish I was baptized at, went to school and made my sacraments at was scheduled to close and merge. I knew I needed to help in some way. It became simple - digitize the photos and artifacts that were in the History Room and preserve them before they were "lost" forever. When I learned that the very place that helped form the foundation of my faith and education was going up for sale, my heart told me I had to do something to "save" it before it became another casualty of "urban renewal" in Niagara Falls.

While my nature is to work behind the scenes, with encouragement and help from a select few, I learned what was needed to start a non-for-profit organization and took a leadership role. With a small group of dedicated individuals who remembered what Niagara Falls represented and wanted to give back to the local community, Niagara Heritage of Hope and Service incorporated on November 8, 2008. Seven months later, on June 24, 2009, Niagara Heritage of Hope and Service acquired Holy Trinity R.C. Complex. Landmark status followed closely behind, with the complex being listed on the State Register in April 2010 and on the National Register June 2010. I knew I was being called by God to take on a great role when every step of these processes were seemingly easy. I say seemingly because I know that when one does God's work, it is not always easy. It has and is, though, **always** rewarding.

The mission of Niagara Heritage of Hope and Service is to make a positive difference in the local and visiting community coming to Western New York by organizing family-oriented events. The organization provides educational services, social opportunities and offer professional support.

Niagara Heritage of Hope and Service, comprised solely of volunteers, is proud to partner with community members such as Heart, Love & Soul and Niagara County Department of Social Services in assisting those less fortunate in our community through Historic Holy Trinity's Community Thrift Store and Donation Center. Through the partnerships with Niagara University, YouthWorks and other colleges throughout the Northeast, Niagara Heritage has been able teach student volunteers valuable business and renovations skills.

Niagara Heritage has offered historic tours throughout the summer since 2010, established a Community Thrift Store in 2011, has partnered with YouthWorks since 2014, and established a Retreat Center in 2018. The complex has ample meeting space for small and larger groups. This Fall (2019), the Board of Directors is happy to announce the opening of the Foster Hearts program. Foster families in Niagara County will be able to shop at the thrift store for clothing at no cost for their foster children four times throughout year.

Niagara Heritage of Hope and Service relies solely on the generosity of individuals, grants and benefactors. Every donation received goes to the upkeep and maintenance of this National Landmark. As such, we are ever grateful for the support over the years.

As we commemorate 10 years of service and giving back to the local community, I have truly been blessed to be a co-founding member, to take a concept, make it happen. I have learned so much from this experience and am humbled to continue a leadership role to this day. It is because of the dedication of the all-volunteer board of directors and all-volunteer staff as well as our friends, community partners and benefactors that Niagara Heritage of Hope and Service is able to celebrate this exciting milestone.

With a grateful heart, I start by saying thank you to the current Board of Directors, Florian C. Wasiak, Eda Buzzelli, Ken Colella, Jackson Bennett, and Board Secretary Melanie Loss for their vision, insights, commitment and dedication. To all of our volunteers for their tireless effort to maintain the complex, our Thrift Store, Friday Historic Tours and all of our programs. To all past board members, volunteers, benefactors and every person who has helped throughout this journey, thank you for believing in us and our mission. Your continued encouragement, prayers and support to help Niagara Heritage of Hope and Service move forward over the next decade and beyond is truly appreciated. I cannot forget to acknowledge the Polkafest Committee. Without your ideas, commitment, drive and monthly meetings over the past year, this event would not be possible. I am so ever grateful for all we did together to make this happen today! Lastly to my sister who showed love and support throughout the last 10 years. Thank you!

On behalf of the Board of Directors and in honor of the complex's Polish heritage and in celebration of this achievement, we are so happy you could join us today (Jammin' Polkafest 2019) for a fun-filled day of Polish music by PhoCus and Special Delivery, Polka dancing, Polish food, and more. Enjoy!

Dziękuję, Boże błogosław i So Lat!

With gratitude,

*Marg Domagałski*

