

## State and Local

# Nun commits herself to position as leader at hospital in Bryan

Sister's choice of job surprises family, friends

By Pam Trageser  
Reporter

When she first decided to join the convent, Sister Gretchen Kunz's family and friends didn't think she would last.

"My friends and family didn't give me three months," she says.

Kunz not only stuck with her commitment but also excelled in her ecclesiastic profession. She has served as president or administrator of St. Joseph Hospital and Health Center in Bryan for the last six years.

St. Joseph is a Catholic hospital with a concern for the community, especially the poor.

The hospital is committed to helping these people, keeping the hospital stocked with the newest technology, having a good team spirit, making all the ends meet and having a reputation for excellent and compassionate care, she says.

"It means keeping all the diverse forces and departments pulling together as a team to accomplish the purpose of this institution," Kunz says. "It involves empowering people to grow so they can be more resourceful."

These diverse forces include the hospital's board of trustees, the medical staff, the administrative team and all the department heads, she says.

Aside from visiting with patients, Kunz's job involves planning, program development and budgeting. And, as a member of the Board of Franciscan Services, Kunz visits the mother house in Sylvania, Ohio, about six times a year to attend meetings.

But Ohio is more to Kunz than a place to go for conferences.

It was as a second-grader at St. James Parochial School in Toledo that Kunz first had thoughts of becoming a sister.

When she entered a Catholic high school, Kunz had several lay people, priests and seven communities of sisters as teachers, she says.

And by this time in her life, Kunz says she had a strong relationship with God.

"My parents and my teachers helped establish that," she says.

Kunz also says she couldn't help but think she was being called to some kind of service within the church.

So after high school, she decided to give the convent a try.

Once Kunz started looking around, the Sylvania Franciscan order of nuns stood out precisely because it is Franciscan.

This attracted Kunz because she is fascinated by St. Francis and his teachings.

Even today, her love for St. Francis is evident throughout her office. Wood carvings and pictures of St. Francis are displayed on her walls.

Although Kunz joined the Franciscan Community, her parents were very much against the idea, especially her mother.

"She hated the idea," Kunz says. "It took her about 10 years to get over hating the idea."

Although her mother gave her a tough time, Kunz says it was an unusual kind of grace because it made



Sister Gretchen Kunz, administrator of St. Joseph Hospital in Bryan, laughs with C.W. Lucas (left) and Ben Fanette during her visit at the hospital's outpatient center.

Photo by Rodney Rather

her stronger at what she set out to do.

Kunz went through formation — what it means to be a nun — in what she calls "boot camp." Here she learned what kind of commitments she had to make and what kind of relationship she should develop with God, she says.

Formation, like learning, is a life-long process, she says.

The first years are probationary years, which begin with spiritual development — learning how to pray, studying the Old and New Testaments and learning about St. Francis and how he interpreted Christianity.

Later, she learned about the special vows that a religious woman takes and made them on a temporary basis, Kunz says.

The three vows — poverty, chastity and obedience — are called consecrated religious life, she says.

"Everyone can be religious and live a religious life, and everyone is called to," she says.

The first vow, poverty, involves living a simple life.

Sisters do not accumulate any money for themselves. Salaries accu-

mulated by sisters are sent back to the mother house in a combined check.

In return, they receive health insurance, room and board and \$45 per month for other expenses.

"You make the little things in life count," Kunz says. "Sitting on the patio in a rocking chair watching the moon, having a little glass of wine can be an awful nice thing to do in an evening."

Local Franciscan sisters have received several gifts from people in the area, including a VCR and free movie rental coupons that they redeem occasionally.

The vow of chastity is both difficult and rewarding, Kunz says.

"Chastity means we have promised not to marry or enjoy any of the joys of the married, and that's tough, too," she says. "The up side to this promise is never to choose one person, but be open to everybody. This was the Lord's view as well as St. Francis'. Nobody is turned away."

The obedience vow includes sensitivity to and awareness of needs of the community and the other sisters.

Kunz's sensitivity and community awareness shows when she describes how she felt when she was asked, at 47, to attend nursing school.

"I really felt I would be a wonderful caregiver," she says.

Kunz attended nursing school in Sandusky, Ohio, where she eventually earned her nursing degree. Kunz was a staff nurse, a charge nurse, supervising nurse and director of nursing service for 10 years and did some in-service education work.

After completing her second master's degree in health and hospital administration, Kunz was asked to come to Texas and become administrator at St. Joseph Hospital and Health Center.

"You've got to be kidding," Kunz replied when asked if she would come to work.

Despite reservations about taking on the task and moving 1,300 miles from home, Kunz says she is glad she gave it a shot.

And although Kunz already has been in Texas three years longer than she originally intended, she now has no plans to leave.

## 4 Texas counties give voters chance to decide pari-mutuel betting issue

(AP) — At least four Texas counties could be at the starting gate in the race to snare a pari-mutuel horse track if voters approve the issue at the polls on Nov. 3.

Voters statewide will decide that day whether county-option wagering should be allowed Texas, while voters in Blanco, Gillespie, Tarrant and Goliad counties also will be casting ballots on the issue locally.

A group of racing enthusiasts, meanwhile, appealed to the Harris County Commissioners Court Tuesday to follow suit and get the issue before voters at the same time as the state referendum.

Commissioners said they would consider the issue later this month.

And in Sherman, members of the Texoma Horse Racing Association ended a four-week petition drive with enough signatures to put county-wide pari-mutuel horse racing on the Nov. 3 ballot. That would allow Grayson County residents to vote whether they want county-wide horse racing.

Commissioners courts in Blanco,

Gillespie, Tarrant and Goliad voted unanimously Monday to add the issue to the ballot, with some officials citing cost savings as the reason for combining the two issues on one ballot.

"This will give Tarrant County the opportunity to get a jump on other counties and get a track here."

— Tarrant County Commissioner O.L. Watson

lot and others saying they wanted to be on the starting line for getting a track.

A state racing commission would have to approve track permits in counties where the issue has been sanctioned by voters.

The statewide referendum limits the number of race tracks to three in Texas. Only counties with a population of 750,000 or more — or their adjacent counties — can qualify.

"This will give Tarrant County the opportunity to get a jump on other counties and get a track here,"

said Commissioner O.L. Watson, who predicted stiff competition for race tracks if wagering is legalized.

"There probably will be two race tracks built in North Texas — a

quarter-horse track and a thoroughbred track," Watson said.

Tarrant County election administrator Robert Parten said the county could save up to \$125,000 by adding the local issue to the state vote.

Former Houston Oilers Coach Bum Phillips, a horse breeder, led the Harris County racing enthusiasts in appealing to the commissioners court to put wagering up for a local vote.

Albert J. Poujoul, a longtime proponent of horse racing in Texas, said having both elections at the same time would save Harris County

taxpayers \$500,000, the cost of a separate local-option election.

"People would much rather see horse-racing than taxation," he said.

Last March, the Texans for Economic Development Committee said Harris County would reap \$30 million in annual revenues and 1,200 permanent jobs from a horse-racing track.

The Texas Department of Agriculture has estimated that horse racing would bring \$1.25 billion a year to the state's economy and create 10,981 jobs.

The Gillespie County Fair and Festivals Association asked its county commissioners to call for the election.

The group operates a race track in Fredericksburg, with seating for about 3,500, and schedules races for six days annually.

Kim Schofield, secretary for the group, said the facility would be upgraded if the pari-mutuel issues pass, but there are no plans to increase seating.

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