

Catholic officials: Refugee shelter will stay put

BROWNSVILLE (AP) — Five years and 20,000 refugees later, Catholic diocese officials say the new Oscar Romero shelter for Central Americans will stay put for a while.

It was forced to leave the little town of San Benito 20 miles from Brownsville after the city commission there ordered the shelter closed. Neighborhood residents had complained of a lack of order around the center, which sometimes housed as many as 300 Central Americans.

The people in the area were not against the Central American people, said San Benito Mayor Cesar Gonzalez, who first announced he would move the center out of San Benito in 1982. "They were against having so many people in a small area. Their culture is different from ours, from the areas of Central America, and we think there's nothing wrong with walking across people's yards."

The new location, built on a sun-drenched six-acre tract amid scrub brush just outside the Brownsville

city limits at a cost of \$150,000, houses more than 100 Central Americans. More than two-thirds of them are Nicaraguans who traveled 1,500 miles through Mexico and slipped across the Rio Grande, said officials with the Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, which operates the home.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service has a hands-off policy toward the shelter, because it is considered a church, said Omer Sewell, director of the INS' Harlingen district.

Diocese Bishop John Joseph Fitzpatrick at the formal blessing of the shelter on July 19, said, "We've taken care of 20,000 people who otherwise would have been out on the streets."

"We pray especially for the poorest of the poor who come to us daily from Central America to seek food and shelter and hope," the bishop told a crowd of about 400 before he sprinkled holy water around the spartan complex of cinder-block buildings.

But some residents near the new site say the diocese has ignored their wishes by putting the shelter there.

A group called United We Stand picketed the shelter one day and has built a tower looming over the site, from which the anti-Casa Romero group says it plans to keep an eye on the place.

Joe King, a nearby resident who serves as spokesman for United We Stand, said, "Of course, the neighborhood has not accepted this thing."

The group filed suit against the Catholic diocese seeking to shut down the new shelter.

"Already there's strange-looking people walking down the street in

front of my property," King said.

He and others in the group fear the shelter will bring crime and alien smugglers into the neighborhood.

Maria Acosta, who lives nearby, said she worries about the safety of her teen-age daughters.

"My daughters used to be able to take walks in the neighborhood, but now they can't" because they are followed, Acosta said.

Bob White, who operates the Gulf Breeze Mobile Park down the street, thinks the retired Midwesterners who fill his trailers during the winter will take their business elsewhere.

But Fitzpatrick said the shelter residents make a point to stay out of

trouble, because they'll be deported if arrested.

Sister Juliana Garcia, a 54-year-old nun from Spain, who is director of the shelter, said, "The majority of the people of Brownsville accept this house."

She said people from the community volunteer time and some come on Saturdays to socialize.

"The people of Central America are a very joyful people, and they come here to enjoy with us," she said.

The routine at the shelter includes early rising and lights out about 10 p.m., English classes, religious instruction and lessons on geography and civics, said Hernan Gonzalez, who heads the diocese's Christian Services division.

Refugees usually stay two to three weeks, helping with the cleaning and cooking, before moving on, he said. "No one wants to stay in a dormitory with 50 other people where there's no privacy," Gonzalez said.

Many of the refugees say they came here to flee war, military serv-

ice and their government.

Estela Calderon, 29, from Nicaragua, said, "We came here to flee communism. It's a total state there."

Maximiliano Hernandez, another Nicaraguan, said he fled his country with his wife and 4-year-old son because "the government wants to militarize the population."

He said he was tortured by Sandinista government after being accused of counter-revolutionary activity.

"They hit me with sand bags, gave me electrical shocks in the vulnerable places," Hernandez said.

Casa opponents, however, say the church of deliberately built in thousands of potential refugees.

King asked, "Are you talking with liberation theology? If you are, you'll know why they are fleeing people into this country."

Gonzalez, with the diocese, agrees, and said most of the refugees are fleeing a radical government search of peaceful, apolitical

"We've taken care of 20,000 people who otherwise would have been out on the streets. We pray especially for the poorest of the poor who come to us daily . . ."

— Diocese Bishop John Joseph Fitzpatrick

Book tempts customers with homemade pies

Woman trades flower store for bakery shop

NEDERLAND (AP) — When people are rolling over in their sleep, Janet Davis is rolling over the dough.

At 3 a.m. most days, the lights are on at J&J Homemade Pies, and it won't be long before the smell of cinnamon rolls fills the little house-turned-bakery off Twin City Highway here.

After the cinnamon rolls are finished, several employees, mostly members of Davis' family, put different fillings in the sweet rolls and top them with a sugar glaze before putting them in the oven.

And in another room, someone is mixing the dough that will become fried pies — Davis' hottest-selling item.

All the employees try to get the amount of the work done before the sun comes up, the phone starts ringing and the regulars start stopping by for a bite of breakfast on their way to work.

But there never seems to be enough time to get everything done before hungry customers start coming in.

"It's pretty hard to be right in the middle of a batch of something and them have to go and wait on a customer when you're all covered with flour," Davis says.

"But sometimes that's what you have to do," she says.

Davis owned a flower shop for years until she stopped one day and figured just how many competitors she had.

"I started looking around and it seemed like there was a flower shop just about everywhere I looked," she says.

"But there weren't any bakeries," Davis says.

"I raised four sons and all I ever did was cook, so I figured I already had the training," she says.

So she cleared out the flower arrangements two years ago and replaced them with the items she needed to start her bakery.

And when the bakery moved from its former, out-of-the-way location on Spurlock Road to Twin City Highway last February, she had to start ordering twice the amount of ingredients to keep up with orders.

"People don't realize the volume we deal in here," Davis says. "We go through 300 to 400 pounds of flour a week."

Cecilia Bevins, the only J&J employee who isn't a member of Mrs. Davis' family, remembers her first day at the bakery during the holiday season.

She was helping Davis make pecan pies.

"She told me to crack 98 eggs into a bowl and I just looked at her and asked her how many eggs she really wanted me to crack," Bevins says.

"I thought she was kidding," she says.

The bakery is open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, Davis says, "but if someone calls ahead of time and wants to pick something up at 6:30 — or even 5:30, we'll have it ready for them."

Davis lets customers dictate her store hours to a certain extent, and she also lets them dictate her wares.

You name it, they bake it, she says.

"Sometimes, somebody will come in and give me a recipe and ask me to fix it for them, which I do," Davis says. "And people are always suggesting new recipes for me to try."

Davis also prepares non-dairy desserts and convincing "sweets" for diabetics.

She says she wasted countless eggs trying to make a diabetic angel food cake until someone told her that angel food cake is one of the few regular desserts diabetics can eat.

Davis started out by baking traditional pies.

But it wasn't long before her four sons talked her into making fried pies for them to take to work and sell.

They "went over like gangbusters," she says.

So she bought the necessary equipment to make large quantities of fried pies.

That equipment comes in handy now that she sells more than 1,500 of the pastries a week from deliveries to stores and walk-in businesses.

Davis follows two rules in her business: Don't skimp and don't get in a hurry.

Getting in a hurry usually results in wasting materials, she says.

And she doesn't skimp on ingredients because that's just plain good business.

She prides herself in the homemade filling she puts in her custard pies: coconut, chocolate, sweet potato and lemon.

She says she refuses to use prepared filling she can buy by the bucket.

It's a lot more work to use homemade fillings, Davis acknowledges — enough to keep everybody busy — her four sons, three daughters-in-law, husband and mother.

"But I've had older people come in and say, 'I used to buy fried pies like this years and years ago, and you don't see them like this any more,'" she says.

And when that happens, Davis says, all the early morning hours spent stirring pie filling amid clouds of flour are worth it.

'Paradise Hill' brightens life of inventor

DENTON (AP) — The house is half hidden by an ancient oak and the collapsed remains of a front porch.

A refrigerator and stove and appliance purgatory near the door.

The yard is testimony to years of never discarding anything that might bear some use: buckets, planks, dozens of tires, wire cable and a dozen aged vehicles.

John Davis, 85, calls it Paradise Hill.

Davis has raised cattle and on a farm a few miles west of town most of his life.

Davis is an inventor, a horticulturist and a builder of musical instruments.

He's experimented with growing on fruit and pecan trees.

"If I could go round the world, I'd spend money as fast," he says. "But I can't get nobody to stay here, take care of this place for me."

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