

Fruits, vegetables enrich Hot Springs Village parish life

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



HOT SPRINGS VILLAGE — A couple dozen people formed a line in the parking lot of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Hot Springs Village on Tuesdays during the spring and summer months.

The people were not standing in line to receive a sacrament or hear a homily, but to buy fresh homegrown produce from Tom Henry, 55, and Jamie Henry, 40, of Guy (Faulkner County).

“This is incredible. I’m here every week,” said Max Billingsley, 80, who moved to Hot Springs Village four months ago from Mississippi. “This is the best kept secret in the Village. They have all the good garden stuff.”

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Beth Gribbens, a parishioner, said she will normally be at the end of the line to buy produce even when she gets to the church 30 minutes early.

“I’ve been coming here since the beginning,” Gribbens said. “I am buying peaches and tomatoes. I might try some of the green beans.”

For the past eight years the Henrys have been making the 100-mile, two-hour trek from Guy to Sacred Heart of Jesus Church every Tuesday from April 15 through August to sell fresh fruits and vegetables they have grown on their farm. They started the tradition when Father Bill

Elser, pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus, urged them to set up the weekly produce stand at the church.

Father Elser said he came up with the idea when he moved from St. Francis of Assisi Church in Fairfield Bay to Hot Springs Village. The Henrys were parishioners at St. Jude Thaddeus Church in Clinton, where Father Elser was also pastor.

“When I came here from Fairfield Bay there wasn’t anything like this. They (the Henrys) were parishioners I knew, and I asked them if they come here once a week to sell produce,” Father Elser said.

Father Elser can attest to the quality of their strawberries and peaches because they are ingredients of his famous homemade ice cream. He said the Henrys also provide fresh vegetables and watermelons to the parish for special meals.

On Aug. 27, the last sale day, Father Elser helped Jamie Henry sell boxes of fresh peaches, bean, watermelon and squash to the dozens of people lined up. Tom Henry couldn’t make the last trip to Sacred Heart of Jesus because he was preparing fields for fall crops.

Jamie Henry said she enjoys seeing and working with Father Elser to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables to Hot Springs Village. She said the people in Hot Springs Village appreciate the high-quality produce they grow and sell.

“We strive to raise the very best,” she said.

She said she began going to the Catholic Church when she married Tom in 2004. She converted and Father Elser baptized her at St. Jude Church.

“Father Bill baptized me and all of my children,” Henry, a former Baptist, said. “I felt at home at the Catholic church. Tom was a cradle Catholic. The more I went with him to church, the more at home I felt.”

She said it was a good season for her and her family and she looks forward to another season coming back to see her customers at Sacred Heart.

“Normally the last day is the lightest,” Henry said. “During the coming months we will work to bring more produce back to our customers.”