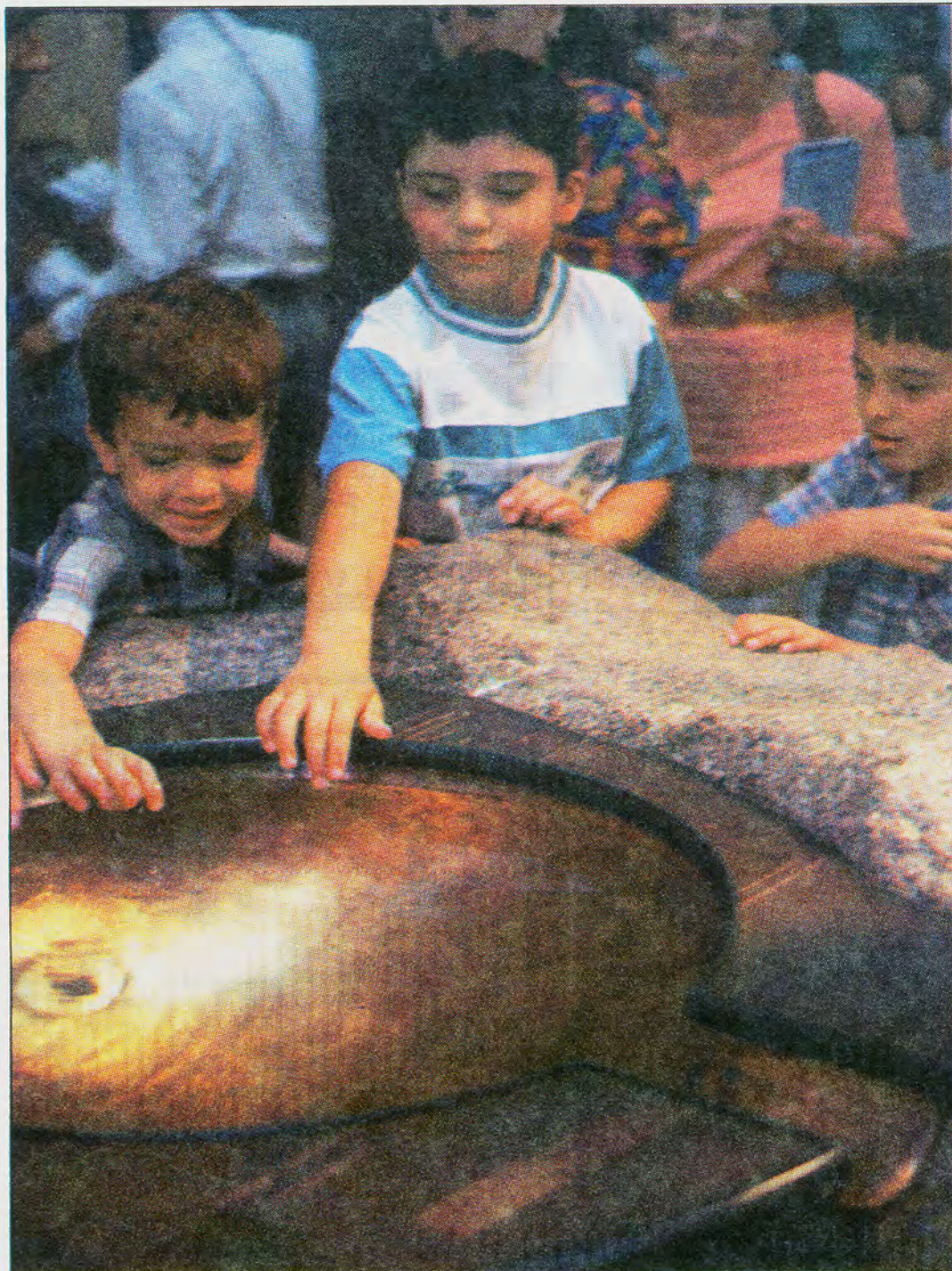


Pasatiempo



*'To pull together
a solution
to the problem
of this
cracked rock,
without having
to remove it,
I decided
to work
with the fabric
of the lives
of the
community.'*

— Tom Joyce,
blacksmith

Forging the spirit of community



Lasked them all to contribute a piece of iron that had some meaning to them, a recollection, a memory, a piece of the past. This gave the font a historical presence. This is the fabric of this community.”

— Tom Joyce



Pieces of metal that were forged together to create the baptismal font for the Santa Maria de la Paz Catholic Church.

Forging the spirit of community



Tom Joyce at work on the baptismal font.

What is a church, but its people? Brick, wood and stone may form a building, but the people and their faith are the mortar that holds it together. In the extraordinary circumstances of Santa Maria de la Paz Catholic Community, formed in

1990 but just now settling into its new home on Richards Avenue, the people of the congregation have put themselves into their new church with such devotion and generosity that the building itself fairly hums with its own heartbeat.

That is due, in no small part, to the unparalleled collection of handcrafted adornments for which the church is now home. Every *santo*, every rug, every chair and candlestick and crucifix was created by a local artisan expressly for Santa Maria de la Paz.

And the results are magnificent.

"All the big early decisions were made by large groups. We'd have meetings of 100 to 150 people at a time," Leo Nolte said of the communal process of creating the new church. Nolte, a retired scientist from Hughes Aircraft, is a member of the building committee and served as the coordinator overseeing its furnishing.

"Once we broke ground, it became clear we needed to furnish it. We kept thinking of more things. We'd need *nichos*, we'd need crosses, a lot of art had to be procured. There was the altar, the kneelers, the pews, everything."

It took a year and a half to fit all the pieces together, and one of the most integral parts of the community effort is the baptismal font, which also is one of the most striking items in the church. The graceful, hand-hammered bronze vessel is surrounded by a patchwork quilt of forged iron mounted in a gigantic rock and created by blacksmith Tom Joyce.

The original granite rock, weighing several tons, was donated by a parishioner and brought in from Las Vegas.

It had been mounted in its central location at the entrance to the chapel before the building was erected and was intended to have a hollow bowl carved into it for baptismal and holy water purposes.

Unfortunately, artist Linda Daboub found the rock kept cracking every time she tried to work on it.

Jake Rodriguez, one of the architects, had seen Joyce's forged iron vessels at Okun Gallery and explained the problem to him.

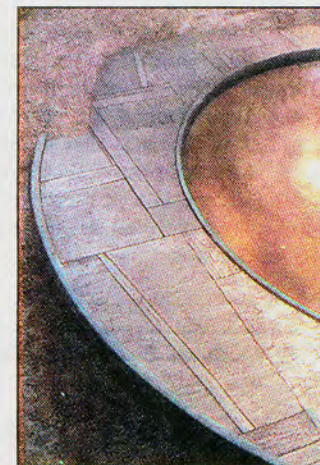
"The solution came to me immediately," Joyce said. "And it was surrounded in clouds of metaphor: the church, the rock, the rock not holding water. I knew the parish had to be involved. A church is not a physical thing, it's always the people that cause a church to work."

The first thing Joyce did was hold an "iron drive." He parked his truck in the parking lot of Piñon Elementary School during Sunday Mass and collected contributions of scrap iron from the parishioners.

"I asked them all to contribute a piece of iron that had some meaning to them, a recollection, a memory, a piece of the past. This gave the font a historical presence," Joyce said.

"To pull together a solution to the problem of this cracked rock, without having to remove it, I decided to work with the fabric of the lives of the community."

The collection process itself was so charged with meaning that Robin Gavin of the Museum of International Folk Art



A detail of baptismal font.

Continued on Page 38

videotaped the event, recording the stories of the items people brought in.

"There were several artifacts that had been found on the Old Santa Fe Trail, like wagon parts and horse trappings. There were old agricultural tools, several artifacts from the burned Abiquiú morada rescued by Charlie Carrillo, and an iron key a parishioner had found in Jerusalem while on a pilgrimage," Joyce said.

"There also was garden fencing, nails, hardware, hinges, baling wire, barbed wire, whatever people had. And they brought me notes and letters explaining the pieces."

Joyce took the pieces to his blacksmithing shop in Arroyo Hondo and reworked them, heating, pounding and folding them until the original shape was unrecognizable. The result is, instead, a patchwork, what Joyce calls a matrix, in which one piece would not stand out but all pieces together would form a unit.

"This is the fabric of this community," he said.

The iron patchwork surrounds the vessel, mounted on the stone. The water flows from the font across the surface of the stone to a pool below. There is also an adult-sized baptismal pool, 9 feet long and 2 1/2 feet wide, covered with hand-carved wooden doors, at the foot of the stone.

The vessel, large enough in which to immerse an infant, is unfinished bronze. Joyce said the plans are to allow it to naturally discolor through oxidation. Without affecting the quality of the water passing through it, the oxidized water will eventually stain the stone as it drips over it, recording the passage of time.

Joyce, who is not a member of the parish, attended the July 10 official dedication of the church, wherein everything was anointed with holy oil and blessed by Archbishop Sheehan. Much of the ceremony involved the use of water and his font.

"It was a pretty special experience," Joyce said. "You could sort of feel everything come to life. I have to say it brought tears to my eyes, to witness something that really created a sacred space."

In the process of orchestrating the project, Nolte has become the resident expert on Hispanic art.

"We have 13 *nichos* for saints, besides Santa Maria de la Paz. We established a few ground rules, as well. We wanted to maintain a gender balance, for one thing, and we wanted a balance that would represent all the backgrounds of the community."

That request explains the unusual presence in a New Mexican church of St. Patrick in a *nicho* all his own. Carved by *santero* Felix Lopez, the *santo* bears an uncan-

ny resemblance to Archbishop Michael Sheehan.

The other *nichos* serve as homes to St. Anthony, carved by Alcario Otero of Los Lunas; St. Martin de Porres, in ceramic by Albuquerque artist Linda Daboub; and St. Elizabeth Ann (Mother) Seton, carved by Tomasita Rodriguez.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk woman raised by the Iroquois who became a Catholic (and is not yet marked with sainthood) also is represented. Created by Jemez potter Maxine Toya, the figure has an Iroquois face and hairstyle but Jemez Pueblo designs on her clothing.

Ben and Michael Ortega carved a St. Jude, whom Nolte said received several write-in votes. Manuel Lopez crafted St. Teresa of Avila and Daboub created St. Frances Cabrini.

Not surprisingly, the *santos* and *bultos* provide faithful examples of the artists' own styles, the styles that have made some of their names familiar to collectors the world over.

"Once we had a set of saints we all agreed to, we set out to commission them," Nolte said.

In addition to some serious scouting done at last year's Spanish Market, Nolte said his primary consultant was Helen Lucero, formerly a curator at the Museum of International Folk Art.

The saints were only a starting point for Nolte. He presented a list of 125 items that his committee was responsible for commissioning by local artists. Some of the artists came to him, requesting the honor of creating an object for the church. Some were recommended by word of mouth, others were names familiar to even the least interested parties.

"We knew we wanted Charlie Carrillo, who is a parishioner, to do the stations of the cross," Nolte said. "We knew we wanted Marie Romero Cash to do the altar screen for the shrine of Santa Maria de la Paz. We knew we wanted Ramón José López to do the processional cross.

"We put together a potential list of 50 to 60 artists, and asked them all for their portfolios or brochures or whatever, and then we got them all together for a big meeting last June," he said.

The *ambo* (pulpit), altar table, reliquary and cantor's desk, made of pine and elaborately carved and spindled, were all created by the team of Roberto Lavadie and Robert F. Montoya Jr.

Several rugs and weavings were done by Norma Media and Eppie Archuleta.

Crosses were provided by Mark Ewing, John Michael Gonzales, Ramón José López and Raymond Lopez. The shrine to Santa Maria de la Paz includes Cash's *reredo*,

bultos and *santos* by Carrillo and Gloria Lopez Cordova, and carved shelves, kneelers and candle boxes by several others.

The reconciliation chapel (once known as the confessional) is a bright, homey room with pieces by Elena Miera Herrera, Michael Apodaca, Bonifacio and Cristina Sandoval, Michael Griego and Juan Trujillo.

The room is centered with a 19th-century crucifix by Jose Benito Ortega of Mora that came from the archbishop's chapel and has been in the safekeeping of Santa Maria's pastor, the Rev. Jerome Martinez y Alire.

"Our budget was less than half of what I have been told this collection represents, monetarily," Nolte said. "That is due to the generosity of all these artists. Some of them outright donated their pieces. Virtually all of them gave us a price break."

Perhaps the finest example of the spirit of creativity and community in the church is in a spot few visitors will be able to see. The corbels on the church's vigas, at 35 feet up, are not easily situated for detailed viewing.

Just knowing that each corbel is decorated with the carvings of members of the entire parish, from amateur to professional, who each were handed a knife, given a quick lesson and allowed to create, may be enough.