

## Friars Club demolished, but ministry continues

Written by Administrator  
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**By Mike Dyer**

**CATHEDRAL DEANERY** — When demolition began on the Friars Club building last spring, many people took time to remember the history of the facility, which is located at Ohio and McMillan streets in Clifton Heights. Those involved with the Friars Club also took time to look at the successful present day ministry of the organization and glimpse into the future.

The Friars Club had a rich history of witnessing to the Gospel message. It was a beacon of hope for many people through its services, including transitional housing for men, help for the homeless, assistance for families and after-school programs for children.



**The Friars Club building** pictured here shortly before demolition began. (Courtesy photo)  
A ministry of the Franciscans of the St. John the Baptist Province for approximately 150 years, it was founded when German immigrants in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine were concerned their children were getting into trouble after school. In response, the friars at St. Francis Seraph and the former St. John churches developed an athletic program that emphasized sportsmanship and character building.

The Friars Club name was incorporated in 1908, and the organization moved into its new building in 1931.

Activity at the health club on the premises had slowed and the building, which had deteriorated over the years, was not considered salvageable for renovation or other practical use because of its age. It had been vacant since 2006.

Demolition on the building has been completed. North American Properties will construct apartment housing for University of Cincinnati students that is scheduled to open in fall 2011.

While some people may think the Friars Club ministry died when the building closed, nothing could be further from the truth. Just ask Annie Timmons.

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Timmons, who has been with the Friars Club since 1978, served as the executive director the past year. When the building closed, she was determined to continue the organization's ministry and found gymnasiums in seven area schools where she could maintain the basketball and baseball programs. With the help of two full-time employees, she manages the "virtual" ministry, moving from one school to another on different days of the week.

The one constant of Friars Club, which remains a sponsored ministry of the Franciscans, has been the presence of the sports programs — mostly basketball and baseball, geared toward at-risk youth or any other suburban youngsters who might not otherwise be in contact with kids from other backgrounds. There are approximately 500 elementary to junior high-aged youth that participate in the programs. Some of the locations for athletic teams and activities include Northside, Price Hill, Clifton and Bond Hill. The Reds Community Fund sponsors the baseball program.

"Keeping the virtual ministry strong is very important and extremely challenging," said Timmons. "I love what I do. I love the kids, and it was the love of the Franciscans that inspired me to stay and share what they shared with me. Friars is a place where kids can find hope. They get to learn positive values while learning skills and discipline through a shared athletic experience surrounded by positive Franciscan values."

Franciscan Father Maynard Tetreault was executive director of the Friars Club from 1968 to 1981. He said membership in the Friars Club is non-denominational, but he has heard the Gospel message regularly through his ministry with the homeless and poor.

"(The Friars Club) mission I'd say today is just as urgent as it was in the 19th century," said Father Tetreault, who hired Timmons and describes her as the heart and soul" of helping children who participate in the club's various activities.

He said the Friars Club doesn't just teach the children about athletics; it also teaches character, discipline and the right way of doing things.

"I think the mission continues," Father Tetreault said. "Friars Club has done a world of good."

Timmons said her mission is to allow children to have an opportunity to grow up healthy and happy and learn some important life lessons along the way.

"Sometimes simple, positive words or actions can make an impact for a lifetime," she said.

That was the case for Jerry Campbell, who grew up on public assistance after his father abandoned a young wife with three small children. Campbell became involved in a variety of Friars Club activities in the early 1970s, including basketball and baseball. He went on to graduate from the University of Cincinnati and now works as the assistant chief probation officer for Hamilton County.

He returned to his roots and served as a volunteer coach at the Friars Club from 1989 to 2009. In addition, both of his children, Chris and Erin, played basketball at the Friars Club.

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Campbell is grateful for the opportunity the Friars Club offered him to interact with other youngsters, participate in sports in a safe, positive atmosphere, develop leadership skills and learn the value of teamwork. He believes the Friars Club “provides an outlet for youngsters of all ages, offers them solid direction in their lives,” and helps form future leaders.

Ed Kathman, an area criminal defense attorney, has been coaching basketball at the Friars Club since 1990 and said its programs continue to help children build character. There is a sense of pride that goes along with the “history and tradition” of the Friars Club, he said. “When you put on that uniform, you are expected to play with heart and good sportsmanship.”