



Photos by STEVE WEXLER, The Coast Star
On Saturday, the Spring Lake community celebrated the 130th birthday of The Church of the Holy Trinity [right], the borough's oldest church. Members of the church who helped to make the celebration a success included [above, from left] Father Russ Griffin, SSC, who was visiting from the Church of St. Uriel the Archangel in Sea Girt; Trustees Tom Burkhard; Grant Gille and Penny Hoffman; organist David Citron; Trustee Brian McLaughlin; President Nancy Carson; Treasurer Dawson Smith; and Father Peter Stimpson. Attendees first enjoyed a service led by Father Stimpson [below, center], followed by a special performance — which re-created the founding of the church in 1881 — by members of the Spring Lake Community House Theatre [bottom, right]. Those members included actors Mary Ann Pierce [bottom right photo, from left], Karen Phillip Burlington, Doug Moore [also above, left], Ian Moore, Jay Draper and Frank Leonhardt. Currently, the church is seeking donations from the local community to help it toward its goal to restore the building's original Pennsylvania slate roof [below, left].

Holy Trinity celebrates 130 years

Spring Lake's oldest church, The Church of the Holy Trinity, has served as a historic cornerstone of the community for more than a century

By Caren Caterina

This past Saturday, Spring Lake celebrated a very special birthday — not in honor of one of its residents, but, a historic landmark which has faithfully served the Shore community as a summer chapel for over a century.

On June 25, dozens of local residents gathered inside The Church of the Holy Trinity to take part in celebrating its 130th birthday.

The Church of the Holy Trinity — the oldest church in the borough — is located at the corner of Monmouth and Third avenues, in Spring Lake. It is an Episcopal Church, but welcomes people of all denominations and backgrounds.

Holy Trinity is the first building in the borough to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Saturday's celebration began with a small church service, followed by its rededication.

Attendees also enjoyed a performance by members of the Spring Lake Community House Theatre, who presented a humorous, but factual, re-creation of the 1881 founding of Holy Trinity.

Seven actors, under the direction of producer Pat Barry, included Doug Moore, Ian Moore, Frank Leonhardt, Jay Draper, Mary Ann Pierce, Karen Phillip Burlington and Cindy Markus.

Father Peter Stimpson, the church's pastor, led the service, which included prayer, hymns, and Bible readings from 1 Kings and Psalms.

Organist David Citron who played music on the church's 1904 organ, concluded the celebration by leading all in attendance singing, "Happy Birthday."

Prayers of rededication were presented by Dawson Smith, the church's board of trustee treasurer, Nancy Carson, board of trustee president and Father Stimpson.

"God is everywhere," said Father Stimpson. "Why then do we build churches?"

The Church of the Holy Trinity, said Father Stimpson, "is a symbol in Spring Lake that there is a God."

"A church is to help you pray ... to talk to God," said Father Stimpson.

The church, he said, is filled with special symbols to "help you understand religion," such as the fact the church is built in the form of a cross, and, several areas of the alter are built in threes — such as its windows and spires, to represent the trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Father Stimpson said the church has been a part of the Spring Lake community, "way before all of

you were born."

In March 1991, the church was honored by the United States Department of Interior for listing on the National Register of Historic sites after being placed on the Monmouth County Historic Sites Inventory, in 1989, and the New Jersey Register of Historic Places in February of 1991.

The church is comprised of many beautiful features — from its herringbone patterned wooden ceiling to the decorated wooden trusses supporting it.

The Holy Trinity's stick-style and Gothic revival exterior is beautifully capped by the high steep Gothic roof, which is 45 feet to its peak.

The interior of the church contains stained glass windows and boasts one of only two of the county's church organs originally water powered. In 1904, the organ was installed and it was water powered because, according to church officials, the southern part of Spring Lake did not have electricity at the time. The organ remained water powered until 1931.

The Church of the Holy Trinity has served the Spring Lake community, as well as visitors of all denominations, in many ways over the years, including for summer services, winter Christmas carols by candlelight, baptisms, weddings and funerals.

Regular Sunday services are only held from mid-June through Labor Day weekend.

As part of the church reaching its milestone of 130 years of age, a private cocktail reception followed the service at the the Warren Avenue home of Penny and Robert Hoffman.

A donation of \$25 for one person, or \$40 for a couple, was accepted for a post-birthday party reception. Donations from the reception will help the church's Raise the Roof Campaign — to restore and replace the church's 130-year old Pennsylvania slate roof, which is the original from 1881.

"We are trying to put the church back into shape," said Father Stimpson. "It [the roof] is going out on us and we need to replace it."

Board of trustee Grant Gille,

who is co-chair of the Raise the Roof Campaign, along with board of trustee Penny Hoffman, said the church's roof has been repaired many times and is now far beyond repair.

The church is trying to raise \$200,000 to replace the roof and has not only been supported by the community, but, with the help of two Monmouth County Historical Commission matching grants in 2010 and 2011, totaling \$5,600.

During the reception, Mr. Hoffman said Saturday's celebration was "an opportunity for us to share what we came to know as such a beautiful church."

Mr. Hoffman said his family began attending the church in 2000 "and fell in love with the church immediately."

"Our daughter was married there last September, so it is also special in that regards as well," said Mr. Hoffman.

The cocktail reception, said Mr. Hoffman, "was a time for people to congregate."

"And clearly we are trying to raise money to help replace our roof," said Mr. Hoffman, "and to raise awareness as to how important the church is."

Ms. Carson also called the event a "celebration for the entire community that we reached 130 years."

"The Church of the Holy Trinity," said Ms.

Carson, "is still a vital part of the community."

"We really are a landmark in Spring Lake and represent the [town's] history," she said.

"And, we are still a house of God, a place to come and worship, a place where people can feel comfortable to come on a Sunday morning," said Ms. Carson.

"We have people come in shirts and flip flops," she continued. "That is the feel of our church ... spend a little time with us."

"People who come once generally come back, because it has that feel," said Ms. Carson. "It is just a place you can go to worship God and the people who come to the Shore love that. It is a peaceful place and it is beautiful."

Ms. Carson also said what makes this church special is the fact it has continued to remain much in the state it was originally built in — 130 years ago.

"There are not a whole lot of electronics added to it ...," she said, "that's special."

A birthday party wouldn't be complete without some cake, candles and clapping.

Towards the end of the evening, all happily joined in to sing "Happy Birthday" to the church, inside the Hoffman's dining room.



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— Nancy Carson
President, church board of trustees

