

Chuck Gallucci, 68; developer answered Mother Teresa's call

by Michael Kinsman

SAN DIEGO - Chuck Gallucci spent only a year in the seminary, but 35 years later when Mother Teresa called him asking for help, he was quick to oblige.

Mother Teresa, who founded the Missionaries of Charity order and received a Nobel Peace Prize for her work with the poor, asked him to build a church in the El Florido neighborhood in the hills east of Tijuana in 1991.

Mr. Gallucci, an El Cajon, Calif., developer, later would call it the most fulfilling act of his life.

Mr. Gallucci, who built houses, condominiums and various commercial projects, died April 10 after suffering a heart attack in his El Cajon home. He was 68.

In 2001, Mr. Gallucci wrote about the invitation to meet Mother Teresa a decade earlier.

"I was wondering if they got the wrong guy," he wrote. "Why would she want to meet me?"

Mother Teresa had learned that Mr. Gallucci was a frequent visitor to the order's Tijuana orphanage and that he had been helpful in making repairs to the facility. In 1991, he had decided to renovate a small chapel in El Florido for the Catholic Church.

When she met him, Mother Teresa asked him to build an entire church.

"It was then that my whole life seemed to pass before me," Mr. Gallucci wrote. "All the investments, all the money and the many blessings I had been given along the way were now, at once, being called into account."

Mr. Gallucci embarked on a two-year project to build the church. When financial backers pulled out, Mr. Gallucci used his own money on the building. The church was finished in September 1994.

He later agreed to build a convent near Tecate when he learned that 27 nuns were living in a dilapidated one-room building.

The foundation and some framing work had already been done when a contractor stopped work on the convent. Mr. Gallucci reinforced the framing and expanded the project to include a glass-enclosed chapel, study room, kitchen, living quarters and other amenities for the nuns.

Mr. Gallucci, who was born in Detroit on May 16, 1938, grew up on a farm and attended St. Paul's Catholic High School in Grosse Pointe, Mich. Upon graduation, he entered Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, but left after one year of study due to illness.

He moved to California and attended Santa Monica City College before entering San Diego State University, where he graduated with a degree in business administration. In 1962, he was drafted into the Army.

After the service, he became a developer in Torrance, Calif., building and operating preschools before returning to San Diego, where he built three racquetball clubs.

He first learned from some of his workers about Mother Teresa's Tijuana orphanage.

"When he went down there, he saw that it was not just an orphanage, but it dispenses medical treatment, food and clothing," said his sister-in-law, Marge Gallucci-Konjevod of West Hills. "He always said after each trip there that he returned home with a happier heart."

In addition to his sister-in-law, Mr. Gallucci is survived by his wife, Lucia; a brother, Sam Gallucci of El Cajon; and a brother-in-law, Andrew Quartuccio of El Cajon.

A viewing and rosary will be held from 4 to 7 p.m. today (April 17) at El Cajon Mortuary, 684 S. Mollison Ave. in El Cajon. A memorial service will be held at 10 a.m. Wednesday at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, 405 Ballard St. in El Cajon.

Interment will follow at Greenwood Memorial Park.

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