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Seton Center: Touching lives and making a difference on the Eastern Shore for more than 30 years

Last February, the shelves were so empty at the Seton Center that a local company used its marquee to make a plea to the town of Princess Anne. The response was overwhelming, a thank you to an organization that has been touching lives in Somerset County for more than 30 years.

"One group filled up a boat and drove it to us via tractor," said Sister Cecilia McManus, who came to the Eastern Shore as part of a group of Sisters of Charity from New Jersey in 1983. "The community responded and has done so every time we have needed it, which fortunately has not been very often. It was a real testament to the goodness in this community that so many individuals and groups responded."

Seton Center, which is part of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Wilmington, is a multi-purpose center, offering a variety of programs. Those services include financial assistance for basic living expenses during a crisis, an emergency food pantry, immigration assistance and a thrift center.

"We really do touch a lot of lives," added McManus. "It is a welcoming place. Every person that is on the staff here and the numerous volunteers, without whom we could not function, really get the mission. I always have quotes over my desk. The two that I have up now are from the Pope's book



The Princess Anne Chamber of Commerce provided a "boatload" of food to assist the Seton Center last February.

'Only Love Can Save Us.' In one, he says, 'If we can help just one person to have a better life that already justifies the offering of our lives.' I feel that anybody who comes in our doors has a story and we are getting a little piece of it."

McManus and Sister Eileen Eager have been at the Seton Center since the beginning. Instead of forcing an agenda, McManus, Eager, Sister Regina Hudson and Sister Dianne Moore let the citizens of Somerset County dictate policy.

"We listened. Every single program we have done has been refined by the people in the community," Sister Cecilia said. "We have a lot of support from churches, schools, civic organizations and agencies. It was relationship building and getting to know them as they were coming to know us. The Women of Wonder group has met here every Monday night for 25 years. They have the pulse of this county which is quite rural and unique. They taught us so much which was a blessing."

McManus shared her favorite story on the impact her organization has made to the poorest county in the state.

"This story goes back at least 10 years," she said. "A gentleman came in about five days before Christmas. Our Christmas program had already finished. He had lost his job. His wife was in the hospital and he had three small children. He was very tearful and said he knew it was late and wasn't on any list but this just happened and he could not face his children without giving them something on Christmas. Sister Dianne went up to the attic and found some gifts that were given to us late and put away for the next year. We put together a really nice Christmas for him.

"The very next Christmas this man came back with an envelope that had five crisp \$100 bills," she continued. "I recognized him right away. He told us that we helped make Christmas for his children when he could not and he could never thank us enough. I asked him for his name and he told me we didn't need to know that, just that his life had turned around. He has come back every year since, with \$500, often several times a year. He tells us it is hard to explain what we did for him. Sometimes we don't know the difference we make."

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