

# The Spiritual Renewal Center- Its Early Roots and Now

**By Sarita Richmond, Editor**

Some may remember The Spiritual Renewal Center (SRC) from the early 90's, like me; cedar cabins, a simple chapel and one meeting room with stone walkways. As I returned for the Bishop's dinner for the first time in 25 years this past Fall, I was blown away by the many wonderful improvements that have been made since those days. The peaceful nature of the SRC was exactly the same but it had been transformed into a magnificent oasis!

The SRC is located on approximately 40 of 200 rolling acres, owned by the Diocese of Victoria in Texas. It is nestled along the banks of the San Antonio River and for 28 years has been a place of prayer, reflection, spiritual nourishment and peace. The SRC participates in the mission of the church of Victoria as well as the universal Catholic Church by providing a place apart from the demands of everyday life where individuals may go seeking God more deeply in their lives.

The story of the land and how the SRC found its' home there has many facets. The physical location and design of the site was chosen by the 1st Bishop of Victoria, Most Rev. Charles V. Grahmann. The land now owned by the Diocese of Victoria was acquired from Our Lady of Lourdes. Our Lady of Lourdes acquired the land through a bequest from Gussie Schmidt. When Bishop Grahmann saw the character and beauty of the land he instantly knew he wanted the future Spiritual Renewal Center built on that picturesque land! He envisioned a rustic setting with "log cabin" type lodging and a chapel.

The early roots of the SRC date back even earlier to the 1800's. The land was originally owned by Don Carlos DelaGarza who received it from a Spanish land grant. The Amador family, a direct descendent to DelaGarza, still owns some of the land that surrounds the SRC. The "Family DelaGarza Cemetery" is located on the SRC grounds. Amador Amador, his wife Consuelo and their children began working part-time at the SRC in 1988 when it opened. Part-time led to full-time and as daughter Julia Amador who today is the Associate Director of the SRC with her primary responsibility being the manager of the kitchen and housekeeping staffs states, "We already lived out here when I was a young girl, who knew that God would put our work next door to our house!" She also says she feels very blessed to have dedicated her life to her family and the SRC. Julia says, "There is a peacefulness about the place where people regenerate not only spiritually but physically. I've lived here for 43 years!" Julia shares that 18,000 meals were served last year! She and a cook staff serve 3 meals a day and snacks to those on retreat.

Since the SRC's opening in 1988, the Texas climate and insects have not been kind to the buildings. Many of the buildings have suffered from wood rot and termite infestations. With the growth in the number of individuals using the center and the condition of the buildings, the diocese hired Heimsath Architects to help develop a Master Plan for the repair and expansion of the SRC.

A group of approximately 30 individuals representing the various ministries of the diocese met on a Saturday with the lead architect, Ben Heimsath, to collaborate on a new vision for the SRC. It was very important to preserve as much of the original design as possible. After an all-day meeting, the group reached a consensus of the redesign of the SRC including amenities that needed to be added. The most pressing need was the reconstruction of the chapel and the construction of a new multi-purpose building. In addition to the two buildings the group expressed a need for the following amenities: future sleeping quarters, a grotto, outdoor Stations of the Cross, a pavilion for use by the youth and for others during inclement weather, adequate parking, new sidewalks, and a Marian trail (where one prays the rosary as he/she reflects on the mysteries of the rosary).

Once the Master Plan was developed and the projects identified and prioritized, a design phase began using the services of Heimsath Architects. Additionally, a capital campaign was planned to fund the construction of Phase I and other needs identified by Bishop Fellhauer. Through the efforts of a dedicated chancery staff and a fund raising consultant, the diocese raised approximately \$12,000,000 from the "Reflection of Faith" campaign. With \$6,000,000 dedicated to the SRC, construction began on the new multi-purpose building and the reconstruction of the chapel. Both projects were completed in 2009 and the diocese now has Hermes Hall which can accommodate large group meetings and Incarnate Word Chapel. In 2011, a new dorm was constructed with 16 rooms sleeping a total of 48 people. The new dorm has yet to be named. The diocese is hoping to find a donor who will contribute \$225,000 towards the cost of the building for the right to name the dorm in honor of or in memory of a family or individual. There are plans for two more dorms that will mirror the one already built. In time, most of the log cabins will be razed due to the damage done by the wood rot and termites. In addition to naming the building, individual sleeping rooms may be dedicated in honor of or in memory of a family or individual for a donation of

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\$10,000. To date, only one room has been reserved.

This year, through a bequest and the proceeds raised through the Bishop David Fellhauer Invitational Golf Tournament, a new pavilion will be built behind the old Emmaus dining hall. The golf tournament, hosted by Knights of Columbus Council #9088, is held annually. The proceeds from the tournament go to support the education of seminarians and the youth and seminarian/vocation offices.

To date, the facility has been used by thousands of persons of all religions. Some more recent groups that have spent time at the SRC include St. Thomas University, ACTS Retreat groups, priest retreats, youth groups from the Diocese of Victoria, the Chancery Staff and others. Bishop Cahill came to the SRC as a seminarian never thinking he would be the bishop of the exact same diocese!

On a day-to-day basis Deacon Joe Duplán, Director of the SRC, oversees the grounds and works with the employees of the SRC. He books events, participates in some events and works to constantly improve the SRC. Deacon Joe shares, "The Center is an oasis away from everything where you can work on your spiritual life and come together with nature." Deacon Joe is also a master electrician which has been of great benefit to the operation of the SRC.

The desire of the Diocese of Victoria and all who have experienced the beauty and peacefulness of the SRC is for as many others as possible to experience the same.

To make a reservation or book a retreat at the Spiritual Renewal Center call (361) 572-0836 or visit **[victoriadiocese.org](http://victoriadiocese.org)**. If you are interested in naming a room or the new dormitory, contact Mike Brown at (361) 573-0828.