

Mary Ann Fath, CSJ February 15, 1934 ~ December 9, 2018

This witty “tell it like it is,” lover of the land was born on a farm just east of De Graff, MN, on February 15, 1934, and died peacefully on December 9, 2018 at Carondelet Village in St. Paul. She attended high school at St. Mary’s Academy in Graceville, MN. It was there that she met the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and at the young age of 18, went to St. Paul to enter the community. Her first vocational work began in food services for St. Mary Convent, St. Paul Seminary, and St. Joseph Academy in St. Paul, and later at St. James in Grand Forks, ND. From there Mary Ann found a long and lasting home at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, where she spent the next 44 years working in a variety of departments including: the library, purchasing, receiving and the mail room. Her greatest joy came from the nearly 40 years she spent working in the greenhouse and with the grounds keeping crew. In 1987 she was named Staff Person of the Year for her service “above and beyond.” Affectionately nicknamed “Sister John Deere,” Mary Ann could always be found tending, planting, pruning and weeding, to which she would remark, “I often wish God hadn’t made it so difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff in his big garden.”

From Natural Wonder: Groundskeeper extraordinaire “Sister John Deere” helps to keep the St. Paul campus looking beautiful.

by Laura Billings Coleman, Jul 13, 2012

“Thanks to her five-decade career, Sister Mary Ann likely has encountered every student who has stepped on [St. Kate’s] campus since 1972; at the very least, her work has touched their lives. Though she began her calling as a nun with the moniker Sister Louis Joseph, she may be better known as ‘Sister John Deere’, a student nickname that acknowledges Sister Mary Ann’s many years helping to keep the campus lawns and green spaces trimmed and tidy.

Whether she’s cheering on the basketball team, removing snow from the sidewalks or pacing the sidelines at a soccer match, Sister Mary Ann is something of a University mascot. ‘Part of what makes her legendary is the fact that she’s been consistently present, and the students notice and appreciate that,’ says Brian Bruess, vice president for enrollment management and student affairs.

Though her cropped white hair, sensible glasses and green golf shirt make her easy to spot, being noticed has never ranked high on Sister Mary Ann’s list of priorities. ‘Being outside,’ she says, spreading her arms wide and beaming as a breeze rustles the leaves overhead. ‘I love that I get to be outside.’

... In 1972, as many Catholic grade schools and high schools began to close, Sister Mary Ann brought her talents to St. Kate’s; 70 Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet were living on campus at the time. She’s watched the mood and priorities shift as each successive generation — from Baby Boomers to Millennials — has left its own mark on the campus. ‘The hippies were awfully friendly’ she says. ‘But today’s students are a lot less trouble.’

Now more than 12 years past 'retirement age,' Sister Mary Ann has accrued more vacation time than she cares to use. 'What would I do anyway? I'd just get bored,' she says, adding that the on-the-job exercise helps her look and feel younger than her years. Her daily devotional also does wonders: 'I do like to stretch out on the floor while I say my Rosary. That really helps my back.'"

Mary Ann loved hiking and had the opportunity to travel to Ireland twice with her hiking group, first to the south and then the north. She loved to read, especially novels ("whatever I can get my hands on"), bike riding, and swimming in the lake at Timberlee.

One day while wearing her old Dobbin straw hat she was asked about her vocation as gardener, to which she offered: "Nuts, its gritty, back-straining, hot, sweaty, and you never beat the system of weeds... but it's great."

Preceded in death by parents Margaret (McQuaid) and Peter J. Fath, she is survived by sister Lois Huges; brother Joseph Fath; many nieces and nephews; friends and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and Consociates.

Mass of Christian Burial was 11:00 AM, Friday, December 14, 2018 at Our Lady of the Presentation Chapel, 1884 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul, MN with Visitation at 10:00 AM preceding Mass, and burial at Resurrection Cemetery in Mendota Heights, MN.

Sister Mary Ann, rest in love and peace.