

# Old tradition paying off big

## Company markets St. Joseph statues to help sell real estate

BY LAUREN HEIST  
Daily Herald Staff Writer

Some people think the best way to sell your house is to get busy with a brush and paint.

But if you ask Ann DeMartino of St. Charles, the secret to selling a house is burying a statue of St. Joseph in your yard.

"Faith moves mountains and homes," said DeMartino, who owns TWOS Sales Inc., a company that sells small statues of St. Joseph at wholesale prices to hardware stores, religious stores and real estate agents around the country.

The tradition of burying St. Joseph statues to help sell a home dates back to 18th century Europe when an order of nuns buried St. Joseph medals in the ground to help them buy land for a new convent. Eventually, people began burying the statues to sell rather than buy property.

Fran Dugo of Algonquin said she's seen evidence of the tradition's power.

"I've done it," said Dugo, 49. "I lived in Melrose Park at the time, and our house wasn't selling, and it seemed like it did work."

Dugo now works as a Realtor and gives clients statues whenever they request them. "It's folklore," she said. "It's definitely an interesting tradition."

The Rev. David Turner, assistant to the provost for mission and identity at Benedictine University in Lisle, said he doesn't put much stock in the statues. "I think it's a superstition, personally," he said.

But Turner said the practice can't hurt, either. "Prayer is a good thing and asking for the intercession of the saints is a good thing," he said.

DeMartino said burying a statue and asking for God's help can make people feel more at ease during a stressful time.

"I think selling a home is always a difficult thing to do. There's only so much in your



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Dawn Grossen, an employee for the past 19 years at Pioneer Center in McHenry, packs St. Joseph statues, which are sold by TWOS Sales Inc. of St. Charles. TWOS Sales Inc. sells 70,000 to 80,000 statues annually in 38 states.

### TWOS Sales Inc.

**Business:** Wholesale, religious statues

**Location:** St. Charles

**Web site:** [www.stjoetwos.com](http://www.stjoetwos.com)

### Pioneer Center

**Business:** Nonprofit organization that provides work and housing for the mentally and physically disabled

**Location:** McHenry

**Web site:** [www.pioneercenter.org](http://www.pioneercenter.org)



Ann DeMartino of St. Charles, owner of TWOS Sales Inc., sells statues of St. Joseph that people can bury in the yard when they want to sell their home.

power," DeMartino said. "It lessens the worries. I think that's why people turn to it."

DeMartino, 44, is a mother of three who had never run a business until she took over TWOS Sales when her father, Jerry Micklewright, died in 1999. He started the business in 1992.

DeMartino said her father, who was in real estate, started the business because he thought too many people were fussing over minute details of the ritual, like how deep to bury

the statue and how far away from the house it should be, rather than on simply asking God for help.

"The focus should not be on the burial of a statue. The focus should be on faith," said DeMartino, a member of St. Patrick's Catholic Church in St. Charles.

The gray plastic statues

DeMartino sells are about 3½ inches tall and come with a prayer to the saint and each one has a suggested retail price of \$5.95 to \$6.95.

In the beginning, Micklewright sold the statues mostly to religious stores and catalogs, but DeMartino said she has

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# Statue: Expansion efforts center on hardware stores

been trying to market the statues to more secular businesses that cater to home sellers — like Ace Hardware and True Value stores — or places people might make an impulse purchase, like Hall-mark stores.

She also recently added a line of statues with the accompanying materials written in Spanish.

DeMartino said sales have slowly but steadily increased since she took over the business and she now sells 70,000 to 80,000 statues a year in 38 states.

The figurines are manufactured in Pennsylvania and shipped directly to the Pioneer Center in McHenry, an organization that helps the mentally and physically disabled find work and housing. About 10 to 15 workers there can box and ship 500 statues a day.

Dennis Bergdahl, 55, lives in one of Pioneer's group homes for

the physically disabled in Johnsburg. He earns 6 cents every time he carefully folds a cardboard tray and inserts the tray, statue and prayer card into a green box.

Bergdahl said he enjoys his work, but he hopes to do something else someday.

"My goal is a little bit higher," he said.

Celia Read, program manager at Pioneer Center, said the assembly work is empowering for the disabled workers.

"They're earning money so they can buy what they need. They're feeling good about themselves because they're being productive," she said.

DeMartino's father established the relationship with Pioneer Center in 1993 and she said she thinks her father would be proud of where his business is today.

"The core of my dad was his faith," she said. "He'd be thrilled to see it continuing on."

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**Business**  
**Faith moves real estate**  
Why some swear by statues of St. Joseph



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