



John Schultz/QUAD-CITY TIMES

**BILL WUNDRAM**

## St. Joseph makes believers of hopeful home sellers

**D**ONNA Rogers had been trying to sell her restored home in Rock Island's Broadway Historic District for a year. She had a few lookers but no buyers. On a whim, she planted a statue of St. Joseph in the yard and went out to lunch. By the time she returned, about 90 minutes later, she had an offer in hand and sold the place for more than she expected to get.

Just another St. Joseph coincidence? Hold on. St. Joe is getting the job done. He's so popular at selling homes this springtime that a week ago Saturday, the Religious Supply Center in Davenport sold 20 of the neatly boxed St. Joseph statue kits at \$6.95.

"It's a steady item all year, but it's especially strong right now," says Mark Gould, owner of the business.

**The scheme**, practiced for as long as only St. Joseph knows, is to plant a statue of him in the ground outside the home you want to sell. There are stories without end about the success of St. Joseph, who may be especially blessed among homeowners because his trade was that of a carpenter.

Take the case of Mary Allard Gabrilson. She didn't have much success selling her home at 15 Kenwood, even though it is in McClellan Heights, one of Davenport's choice neighborhoods. She put a St. Joseph's statue in the ground and had a quick sale. The owner backed out at the last minute because he couldn't sell his house. Mary left St. Joe in the ground, and sure enough, another buyer came forth. This time, the sale didn't fall through and Mary and her husband, Burr, are living happily ever after in a condo.

"I hear stories like this every day," says Gould. He reaches under his counter to pull out a big case of boxed St. Joseph's statues that come with instructions on how the statue should be buried. Gould told how a friend had been trying to sell a condo for two years: "He put a statue of the saint in the ground and sold the place the next day."

**Many think** this is superstitious voodoo, but real estate people like Joe Seefeldt, who is with Mel Foster, are believers. "I've heard too many stories about St. Joseph not to believe that there is something to it," he says. "If it's faith, that's fine. But to make it work, you have to believe. I had a neighbor who sold his house two days after putting a statue in the ground."

How St. Joseph is planted in the ground is a subject of whim, but it's generally agreed that he should be 12 inches below the surface.

I have heard many burial instructions. Most are different. Some say he should be buried upside down; others say right side up. Some say plant him in the front yard; others, the back. At the Religious Supply House, a buyer wondered if St. Joseph should be put in a plastic bag before burial. Another customer spoke up: "Oh, gracious no. He would suffocate."

Leone Bredbeck, a retired real estate agent, has heard the St. Joseph statue story for many years. "If a statue sells a place, the homeowner thinks it works. It makes them feel good, but personally I think three things sell a house: Condition, location and price."

**One of the amazing** tellings of the St. Joseph legend is Donna Rogers' story of the sale of her home at 603 23rd St., Rock Island.

"My place just wasn't selling. At 11 a.m. one day I planted a St. Joseph and went to lunch with a neighbor. I returned to have a call from an agent who faxed a proposal. The intended buyer had seen my place just 45 minutes after I put St. Joseph in the ground. It sold for \$10,000 more than I expected to get; it went for \$145,000. I'm thanking St. Joseph and telling everyone about it."

The statues are most generally found in religious supply stores. The most popular in the Quad-Cities is a little boxed version with a plastic St. Joseph inside and assorted petitions to St. Joseph, along with instructions for burial. The box says, "Can't sell a home? Ask St. Joseph, he's sold thousands. Faith can move mountains and homes."

While this kit sells for \$6.95, Gould has other versions of St. Joseph. One is 14 inches tall and sells for \$69.95. I can assume that a statue of this price would be worthy of planting in the ground only for the hopeful sale of a very high-ticket home.