

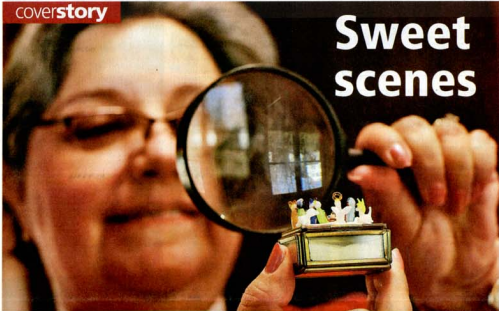
We love it here

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PARSIPPANY • TROY HILLS • LAKE HIAWATHA • LAKE PARSIPPANY • MOUNT TABOR

coverstory

Sweet scenes



Susan Sica, vicar at St. Gregory Episcopal Church uses a magnifying glass to view a miniature hand-blown glass nativity scene from Mexico. More than 200 of her creches from around the world were on view at the fundraiser Cookies & Creches earlier this month. PHOTO BY KAREN FUCITO

Nativity collection and cookies make for tasty fundraiser

By Leslie Ruse
Parsippany This Week

Despite a collection that includes more than 200 creches, Susan Sica of Parsippany is always looking to add more.

"My daughter is in Scotland, and I told her: 'You have to find me a set from there. You mean to say they don't have one where everyone is wearing a kilt!'"

But she hasn't had luck finding anything like that. I'm still hopeful though. It's a disease, folks. I can't help myself," said a laughing Sica, the vicar of St. Gregory's Episcopal Church in Parsippany.

On Dec. 3, St. Gregory's Episcopal Church hosted its fifth annual Cookies & Creches, a holiday celebration combining fundraising with Sica's collection of nativity scenes. Visitors viewed the award-winning creche collection and purchased

cookies from a huge assortment for \$8 per pound. All proceeds benefited the church.

"The creches will only be up for one day because we don't have a hall and we worship in here. Seeing these makes it feel kind of like Christmas," said Sica, who started her collection in high school in Mexico. "It sort of kept growing. This is my own collection, and one of my parishioners convinced me to set it up. It's a

theological statement being able to see Jesus across cultures. I guess that's why I love them so much."

Sica and several church workers spent 25 days setting up her collection.

"One year, a lady came, and she was taken with the German set. She got teary-eyed and shared how it reminded her of her brothers, and in that moment, she

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from the cover

Photos by Karen Fucito

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connected back to her family. Just like Christmas. I'm so happy to share all this with everyone," Sica said.

"When I look at them, this is what someone in Peru, India, Jamaica thinks. This is their interpretation. That's what's so really neat about it. A whole lot of cultures are saying: 'This is how I wanted to express God incarnate.' Here's the telling across cultures. This intrigued me," Sica said.

Before buying cookies, many customers walked along the tables looking at the nativities, with many taking photos.

"This is the first year I've come here, and it's absolutely beautiful. So many different countries are represented. It's so international," said Diane Thorman of Mt. Tabor.

"This is the most impressive display I've ever seen," Wendy Spector of Parsippany said.

More than two dozen miniature creches were featured. Magnifying glasses were placed on the table, inviting visitors to get a closer look.

The miniature sets included one from France set in a walnut shell, another inside a shell from Guatemala. A Mexican hand-painted miniature

was set in a water jug.

"I love these creches. I come every year. They're all so pretty. She has a fabulous layout of these creches," Alice DuBois of Parsippany said. "It's a lovely church. I come for the cookies and the displays."

Sica's creches include a set made of banana leaves from Kenya; an Alaska nativity that included a polar bear, seal and walrus as the three wise men; a hand-painted set from Germany; a porcelain set from Holland; one from Nepal that had a basket with rushes in it; a set from Peru that had baby Jesus in a banana leaf and included a llama, and a knitted set from Canada, which included a black sheep, white sheep and a black and white sheep.

"Look at the work. Can you believe it? They're so small and what a lot of work," Sica said, bending down to examine a crched nativity from the United States.

A felt set from Kyrgyzstan included a llama, a sheep and baby Jesus with orange hair. "Isn't that unique? Look at that orange hair," Sica said.

"Here's a carved gourd from Mexico. See, who would put salamanders on it? But that's something that's from their culture. They're all so lyrical and poetic when you think about it."

Cookies & Creches organizer Meg Frigeri and volunteers spent three days baking more than 25 types of cookies. Among the varieties were cranberry crumb bars, German chocolate chip, apple nut bites, peanut butter chews, ricotta cookies, coconut diamonds and large iced Christmas trees.

"Cookies are a lot of work. We had lots of volunteers to bake and the proceeds go to the church. And we sell lots of cookies. They'll all be gone by the end of the day. People come, they have their favorites. This is always a lot of fun to do," Frigeri said.

"I've seen these creches so many years now and I still love it and appreciate it. When I see these, this puts me in the spirit of things," Whippany resident Carol Baska said.

A member of the church since 1971, Baska said: "It all comes together in the end. We had to bake the cookies here because of the Board of Health. They really watch everything. We're really just trying to make money for the church. We baked a lot of cookies. Some people just come for the cookies. But I want everyone to appreciate these wonderful creches."



Susan Sica and a carved wooden creche.



From left, the Mlynarski family of Parsippany, Linda, 8-year-old Kayla and 11-year-old Kyle, and Lillian Portington.



Diane Thorman of Mt. Tabor, left, and Michelle McBriarty.



One of Sica's nativity scenes.



William Portington of Parsippany.