



# Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

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## Golden Girls of the GHS

By M. Helen Williams

### *The Golden Girls, Elizabeth!*

*(Part 4 in a Series of 4)*

The last of Gretna's Golden Girls, Elizabeth Rau Schwarz died peacefully in her sleep on Aug. 9, 2017 at almost 89. Elizabeth's degree in education from Newcomb College led to her decades-long high school teaching career. Besides being a licensed tour guide, she had diversified interests from professional organizations to knitting, games and parades.



Elizabeth Schwarz

A lifelong resident of Gretna, she was "The Gretna Newspaper." To find out what was going on in Gretna, you'd call Elizabeth. She enjoyed whatever life had to offer. Her philosophy was "home is where you go to when you have nowhere else to go."

Elizabeth's dedication to Jesus and St. Joseph Church earned her the Order of St. Louis IX Medallion, the highest award a layperson can receive from the Archdiocese of New Orleans. She served as Lector and Eucharistic Minister and attended Mass daily. She made cookies and worked the St. Joseph Day Altar and gift shop. She loved the Lenten season, being quite fond of "C & C," Stations of the Cross & Catfish!

Elizabeth, along with her husband of 63 years, Irvin Schwarz Sr., and the "girls" were a driving force in establishing the Museum Complex and its restoration. They painted, hammered, made curtains and did whatever needed doing. Their fundraising efforts were infamous!

Former Mayor Ronnie Harris would consult the Golden Girls on projects he proposed, aware that if they opposed them, the projects wouldn't happen. His assigned projects to them were done efficiently and flawlessly. They recorded and photographed all the historic houses in Gretna to prepare for its designation as a Historic District. City Council members would groan when they saw Liz at a meeting, knowing she wasn't happy about something going on, or about to go on!

Elizabeth served Gretna well and was presented with the coveted C.W. Cox Life Enhancement Award that acknowledged her exemplary community service.

She was Krewe of Cleopatra's third Queen who christened the Royal Barge! Until her death, she participated annually in the Chris Owens Easter Parade. She was a delight dressed in her German dirndl as she worked at the German Beer Garden for Gretna Fest and Oktoberfest.

She was a founding member of the German Heritage, Cultural & Genealogical Society of Louisiana and an active member of the Friends of the German-American Cultural Center. She served on the Jefferson Council for Aging for 15 years. Elizabeth was "Woman of the Year" for the National Federation of Business & Professional Women; the Louisiana Federation of Business & Professional Women; and the American Business Women's Association Audubon Chapter. She was twice voted "Woman of the Year" for the Westside Business and Professional Women.

Sylvia Schwarz, Elizabeth's daughter-in-law and constant companion, said, "I called her 'Macho Mom' because she could do anything she set her mind to. Unbeknown to us, after Dad died, she moved several lengths of pipe from the yard to the garage because she was tired of looking at them. She commented that she had not used her knowledge of physics for a very long time.



From left, Anne Gauthreaux, Carol Maness, and Patsy Butts, with Elizabeth Schwarz in front.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## *The Golden Girls, Elizabeth!*

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“She continued to cut her grass until the day she died, in spite of efforts of family and neighbors to do it for her. When people offered to help, she firmly replied ‘NO!’ Cutting her own grass was a point of pride for her.

“She drove herself all over and only in her last years did she restrict her driving to mostly around Gretna. One friend said that riding with Liz was interesting because she regarded ‘Stop’ signs as a suggestion. She was a regular at ‘Ladies Night’ at Gattuso’s on Wednesdays. One of our ladies group would tell everyone about her 88 year-old drinking buddy.

“Everyone who met her, loved her. Her circle of friends extended to friends of friends in Tennessee, Wyoming, Wisconsin and Minnesota. On her last trip to Tennessee, she proudly participated in a ‘Tea Party’ protest.

“To sum it up, she was a ‘Force of Nature.’ The world is a better place for her having been here, but not as good of a place now that she is gone. We believe Jesus came to her that morning and said ‘O.K., it’s time to go’ and she replied ‘O.K.’ and she left us to be with Him!”



## *The President Presiding...*

By Sylvia Schwarz, GHS President

If you are wondering what to do on the weekend in October, have no fear. October in Gretna is a very busy month with:

- **Oct 7, 8, 9** - Gretna Fest - Visit the German Beer Garden
- **Oct 13** - St. Joseph Sneak Peek - Pay \$5 and shop early, 5-7 p.m.
- **Oct 15** - St. Joseph Rummage Sale, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m., in conjunction with the Gretna Citywide Yard Sale, 8 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- **Oct 20** - GHS Membership Meeting/Birthday Party - St. Joseph Gym @7 p.m. (A week later than usual due to Rummage Sale Sneak Peek) Councilman Mike Hinyub will be guest speaker
- **Oct 29** - Chili Cookoff on the River 2022, 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- **Nov 10** - GHS Membership Meeting/Memorial - St. Joseph Gym @7 p.m. There will be voting for officers and board members.
- **Nov 12** - Cemetery Tour tickets are now on sale at the White House. Call 504-362-3854 or stop by during the day. Tickets are \$25 each. Don't wait to buy your tickets because they sell out fast!
- **Dec 8** - GHS Membership Meeting/Installation of Officers/Christmas Production - St. Joseph Gym @7 p.m.

The annual Barbecue, moved to September due to bad weather, was a rousing success. With God's help, the weather was agreeable as the rain went around us. The food was yummy and plentiful. A big thanks to our BBQ grillers, Garland Gaspard and Blaine Daigle. Sarah made the famous Daigle family potato salad. Baked beans by Paul Coles and Chili ala Judy LeBlanc were super. Kudos to members who brought delicious desserts. Leftovers went to the Gretna Police Dept. Per the members' request, the BBQ will be permanently moved from July to September. Guest Speaker Mayor Belinda Constant gave us a rundown on what was happening in Gretna with the focus on Gretna Fest.

Renovations have begun to repair the porch of the White House that is sinking. During this time, the front door will not be available. Enter the Complex via the alley between the White House and the Fire Museum.

### ***Welcome To Our New Members:***

Brandy Jones, Kristie Giardina, Marion DiMarco, Jill DiMarco, Jane Johns and Gerri Bischoff





## ***Times Past —***

**By Stephanie Dieterich**

### ***The St. Joseph-Hope Haven Connection***

In 1917 Reverend Peter Wynhoven was appointed by Archbishop James Hubert Blenk as pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Gretna. At the time the church parish encompassed all of West Jefferson Parish extending from Gretna to Grand Isle. Fourteen church parishes would eventually be carved from St. Joseph Parish.

Father Wynhoven, a native of Holland, would serve at St. Joseph's until 1935, an 18-year tenure. Throughout this time he would build six churches. During his pastorate at St. Joseph's, he organized Associated Catholic Charities and was instrumental in establishing the Archbishop Blenk Council 1905 of the Knights of Columbus that continues today.

In 1922, Father Wynhoven acquired 50 acres of farm and dairy land in Marrero. The first Hope Haven building, the Dilbert Administration Building, was built in 1925. This impressive Spanish Colonial Revival structure has human gargoyle details that appear Dutch. A year later the present and similar style St. Joseph Church in Gretna would start construction, to be dedicated in 1927. Both buildings were designed by architect William R. Burke under the supervision of Father Wynhoven.

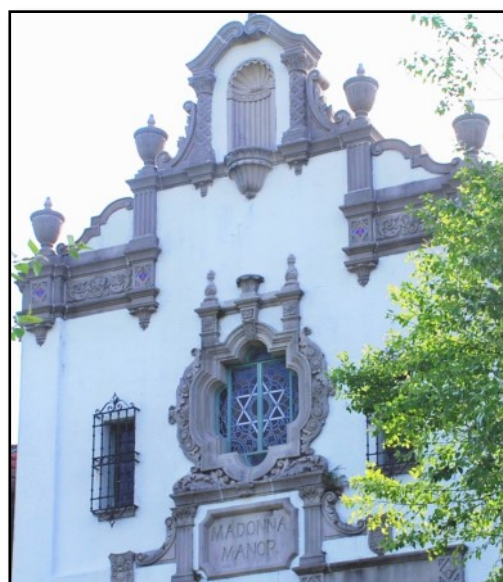
The Hope Haven - Madonna Manor campus in Marrero would eventually consist of seven buildings built from 1925 to 1941. Architect Jack Kessels, also from Holland who lived at 517 Newton St. in Gretna and a relative of Wynhoven, designed the later buildings.

The circa 1931 Marcus Feingold Mechanical and Arts Building displays pliers, axes, hammers and planes in a sculptured relief around the entrance. A dozen trades including woodworking, bookbinding, sheet metal work and farming were taught there.

Madonna Manor is the largest of the buildings on the campus; it opened in 1932 as a home for boys and girls of all religions under 12



At Hope Haven in Marrero, Dutch Gorgoyles are on the Dilbert Administration Building.



The Star of David on the Madonna Manor Building.



Carpentry Tools surround the door of the Marcus Feingold Mechanical & Arts Building.

years of age. The large Star of David on the facade of the building pays homage to the donations from the Jewish community. Chinchuba Institute for the Deaf, which had operated in Mandeville for 40 years, was relocated to the Marrero campus.

In 1940 construction started on the St. Bosco Chapel, the last building built. Kessels designed the exterior, but it was the Hope Haven boys' carpentry skills that completed the inside. The pews, confessionals and railings were all built by the boys in the woodworking shop on the grounds.

Hope Haven -Madonna Manor contains the largest grouping and finest example of Spanish Colonial buildings in Louisiana. The structures have been neglected for way too long, but hopefully they will be restored to their earlier magnificent grandeur.

*Gretna Chronicles succeeds the GHS Newsletter and the Gretna Historical Society Newsletter as the official source of news for the general membership of the Gretna Historical Society.*

## ***Gretna Historical Society***

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### ***Gretna Historical Society Museum Complex***

1840s Strehle Family Cottage, 1859 David Crockett  
Volunteer Fire Co. No. 1 Fire Station (now Louisiana Fire  
Museum), 1840s White Family Cottage

## **Gretna Chronicles**

is published for the members and friends of GHS

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### **ABOUT THE GHS AND HOW TO JOIN**

The Gretna Historical Society was founded in Gretna, Louisiana, in 1969, by Lloyd E. Gomez (insurance man, volunteer firefighter, and community activist), who descended from Gretna pioneers, German immigrants Claudius and Catherine Nuss Strehle. The Society's articles of incorporation were drafted by Gretna attorney Everette F. Gauthreaux and signed in his law office on October 26, 1969. Today, the GHS operates the Gretna Historical Society Museum Complex at the corner of Lafayette Street at Second. It consists of three 19th century Creole cottages, a blacksmith shop, and the Louisiana Fire Museum. The GHS also owns and maintains the caboose and train depot on Huey P. Long Avenue at Fourth Street.

There are no requirements for membership in the GHS, other than the timely payment of annual membership dues of \$20 per person. Monthly meetings are held at the St. Joseph's Auditorium at 7th and Newton Streets on the second Thursday of every month at 7:00 p.m. The society's newsletter, *Gretna Chronicles*, is published monthly and mailed or emailed to all members.

## **Gretna Historical Society**

<https://www.gretnahistoricalsociety.org/>

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