

# Restoration of organ damaged by Sept. 11 attack labor of love for Pergallo family

By MAURA ROSSI  
Beacon Staff

PATERSON — It was more than just another job for John Pergallo Jr., president of the Pergallo Pipe Organ Co. here. When he recently oversaw the restoration and renovation of an ailing organ in a landmark downtown Catholic church in New York City, it was like meeting an old family friend.

"It was his baby all the way, there was a lot of history there for him in Transfiguration Church," said John Pergallo III in a recent telephone interview from the company's Buffalo Avenue offices here.

After all, Pergallo, explained, his father was working on what was then only the third organ designed, built and installed "around 1931, I think" by his late grandfather, John Pergallo Sr., who started the firm.

Among other clients, the firm would eventually include another New York church, St. Patrick's Cathedral, where the Pergallos restored the organ from 1984 to 1997.

Transfiguration Church, at 29 Mont Street, as it happens, is an appropriate place for an inter-generational link, for it is the oldest Catholic Church building in the city. This link with past generations of the parish was observed in a 200th anniversary celebration in October 2001, just six weeks after the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks only blocks away.

The venerable building suffered enough damage from the fall-out of dust and ashes from the attacks to require complete replacement of its floor and carpeting.

According to Pergallo, the contract for the \$100,000 organ restoration "goes back a couple of years," but the instrument definitely took its own hit on Sept. 11, because of the layers of clogging dirt it received.

He explained that it took eight people to "take down" the organ, after which it went through six weeks of work at the firm's shop here. Then it went back to the church to be re-installed by eight people, and finally, two people came to "tune and voice it."

"Voicing means tonally registering each pipe so it speaks right," said Pergallo, who should know, since he is an

organist himself, currently in charge of music ministry at his parish, Our Lady of the Valley in Wayne.

The organ body, he said, is "red oak" and the "facade" is made up of the gold-finished pipes.

The restored instrument was played for the first time and dedicated to those lost or who suffered in the World Trade Center disaster, at a memorial service offered Sept. 11.

Surviving disasters is an old story for Transfiguration Parish. Earlier, it had survived two great New York City fires, one of which started right across the street, another that happened during Civil War draft riots. Then there was the church's own fire, which destroyed its bell tower.

The church's history began in 1801 when it was built by English-speaking Lutherans. In 1810 it was bought by Episcopals, who in 1853 sold it to the then Diocese of New York. It became the church of the parish founded in 1827 by a Cuban-born priest, Father Felix Varela, to serve the first of the 19th century's massive influx of Irish immigrants to the city.

Father Varela, according to the current pastor, Maryknoll Father Raymond Nobilietti, served Transfiguration as pastor for 21 years, and eventually became the diocese's vicar general.

As time went on, there was a change in the national and cultural identity of Transfiguration Parish, as the Irish immigrants were succeeded by those arriving from Italy.

These were in turn succeeded by Chinese arrivals, and today Transfiguration Parish is the largest Chinese Catholic community in the county, with a thriving 900-student elementary school.

Father Nobilietti, a New Yorker, is not only the right man for a New York parish, for he speaks the city's language and knows its culture — he's also the right man for a Chinese parish in New York, for he speaks the parish's language and knows its culture. As a Maryknoll Missionary he spent 15 years in China, during which he became fluent in the Cantonese he first studied at a Chinese university.

Father Nobilietti entered



**FAMILY AFFAIR** — Maryknoll Father Raymond Nobilietti (left), pastor of Transfiguration Parish, New York, and John Pergallo Jr. look over the organ in the church which Pergallo Pipe Organ Co. restored and renovated after the Sept. 11 attacks. The late John Pergallo Sr. designed, built and installed the organ more than 70 years ago.

his order in 1960, he said, and was ordained a priest in 1969 the year he went to China. He came back to the U.S. in 1984.

The Pergallo-restored organ will be blessed and dedicated by Cardinal Edward Fagan of New York at 1 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 27 during a Mass of Thanksgiving celebrating Transfiguration's 175 years of parish life.