

THE

# Landmark

HOLDEN, PAXTON, PRINCETON, RUTLAND, STERLING

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## Monastery planned for Asnebumskit Hill *Teresian Carmelites plan sanctuary on cell tower site*

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PAXTON – Brother Dennis-Anthony has been a Teresian Carmelite since 1980, but last fall, he feels, he finally came home.

It was on a simple walk in the woods after a social event at the home of Joan and John Laracy in Paxton that Br. Dennis found the place he's been looking for. Brendan Laracy took Br. Dennis and his three fellow Teresian

Carmelites on a walk to a vacant property off Nipmuck Road. The wooded area is part of a 99-acre site that winds up Asnebumskit Hill, where a dormant tower looks out over the hills and valleys of Wachusett, and beyond.

There, Br. Dennis, Br. Solomon, Sister Cathryn-Mary and Sr. Nancy-Marie fell silent.

"I experienced a profound welcome, comfort, peace,"

*Continued on page 16*

# Monastery

*Continued from page one*

Br. Dennis recalls, "We knew it was sacred land."

That oneness of mind went unmentioned at the site, but later the four went home to their quarters in noisy Worcester and discovered they were all thinking the same thing: the beautiful site would be the ideal home for the monastery they hoped to build.

"That feeling has never left us," Sr. Nancy says.

It was the beginning of a long hike from idea to reality, but one that is well on its way as of this week: on Tuesday, Br. Dennis signed a purchase and sales agreement with American Cell Tower to buy the site for \$230,000.

## Searching for a home

Even the first stage of this very earthly business deal has been a long time coming for the small group, which includes just the four semi-cloistered members. The group has only donations to rely on for funds, and is dependent on volunteers to provide them with the services they need to complete the task.

"We trust in divine providence," Br. Dennis says.

So far, that's worked very well for the group, which soon after finding the Asnebumskit property, began finding those who could help them achieve their goal. A string of seemingly accidental word-of-mouth incidents has resulted in an advisory group and an assembly of professionals

with expertise in law, real estate, architecture and other fields.

"In the secular world you'd say coincidence," Br. Dennis says. "It's God-indeed, where God prefers to remain anonymous."

Br. Dennis has been searching for the monastery home since 1981, scanning 100 or so properties before finding the Paxton land. The group's current quarters on Chrome Street in Worcester are owned by the Diocese of Worcester and are far from ideal. The four-member community relies on peace as a backdrop to the contemplation and prayer that guides it.

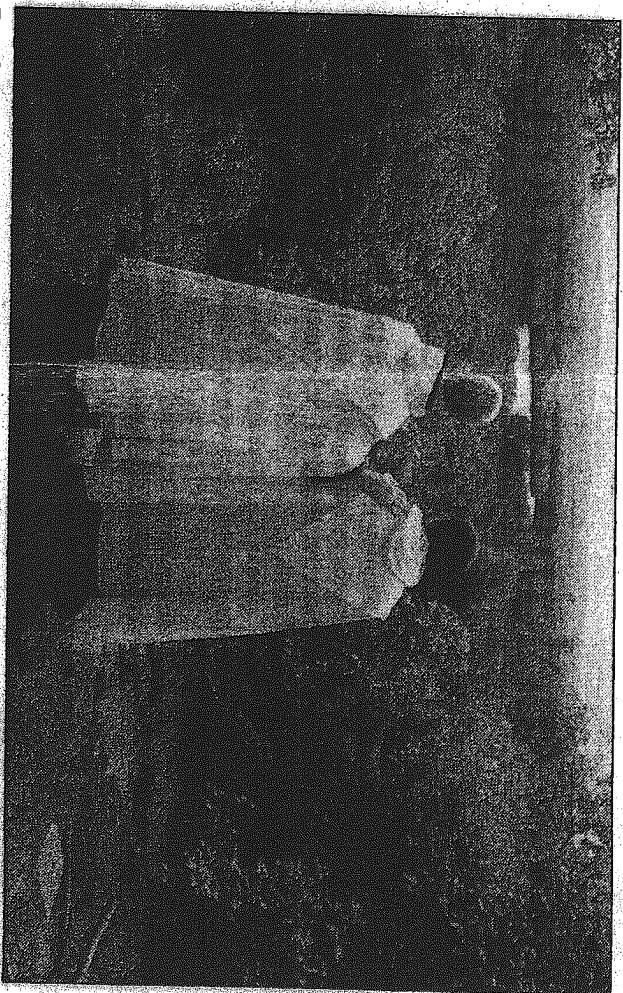
The dream, Br. Dennis says, is to "wake up and hear raindrops on leaves, instead of sirens."

## Teresian order

The order of Teresian Carmelites began with St. Teresa of Avila, a 16th-century Carmelite nun living in a large community, who yearned for a simpler life. She inadvertently started a reform movement by leaving the convent with four novices to return to the simple, contemplative life. That simplicity gained the movement the adjective "discalced," or unshod, a reference to the barefoot nature of that simplicity.

Today, the order wears socks or sandals at times, but the essence of that simplicity goes far beyond mere outerwear.

Unlike other orders, the Teresian Carmelites have no industry associated with their order; they don't make and sell any products. They have active ministries, operating retreats, celebrating Mass on Friday evenings and conducting a TV ministry.



*Brother Dennis-Anthony and Brother Solomon of the Teresian Carmelites take in the view from Asnebumskit Hill.*

But their primary function is prayer.

"For some people, prayer is built around their work," Sr. Nancy says. "For us, prayer is our work."

The group prays six to seven hours a day, and operates a prayer line, used by the faithful to request prayers for a particular need in their lives. The line is anonymous, and all that is asked is that, when the need is fulfilled, the caller inform the order so that a prayer of thanksgiving can go forth. Many are grateful to the order for their prayers, but Br. Dennis believes that sometimes the simple act of listening to someone's problems eases their pain.

"Sometimes I think that when people

hear us, they feel affirmed and it's actually their own faith doing the work," he says.

The unique nature of their order has gained the group some national and international media attention, and the same thing happens when they go into inner city neighborhoods. Their long brown robes sometimes gain unwanted attention.

"We are mocked," Br. Dennis says.

To Sr. Nancy that's OK, because "We're a witness to God."

"We're not here to convert people," Br. Dennis says, "We're here to be a witness, so that they can see that they can be better people."

*Continued on next page*

## MONASTERY —

*Continued from previous page*

### Ecologically friendly

If the Teresian Carmelites' plans go as expected, their impact on the environment and the town of Paxton will be benevolent.

In the back of Br. Dennis's mind is the overdevelopment of his hometown, Shrewsbury. He pictures a prayer spot from his youth, a spot now destroyed. He is determined that nothing detrimental will happen to the hill in Paxton.

Br. Dennis says they intend to, where possible, restore it to its former wooded beauty. Some of the area has been cleared to make way for the radio towers, and the Carmelites plan to restore the native trees and vegetation, and create nature paths for

all to enjoy.

The building will have minimal impact on the environment, drawing in the natural environment with post and beams, stone and glass to frame the green building. For power sources, they plan to use passive solar and geothermal energy. The building will be designed by William McClay of Vermont, an architect noted for his environmentally friendly designs.

The building will be designed for a community of 13 sisters and brothers — the minimum, Br. Dennis believes, to maintain the friendship that unites the community.

Apart from clearing for the building, the only other landclearing will be for a few gardens to give enjoyment to those who

live and visit there.

Last fall as plans began to develop, the Laracies again hosted the group, but this time they invited their Nipmuck Road neighbors to meet the Carmelites who would soon be their neighbors.

Seventy neighbors showed up, and, Joan Laracy believes, they went away relieved. Many neighbors had been as dismayed as Joan Laracy when, last fall, heavy excavating equipment crashed through some of the trees in what seemed an effort to evaluate the site for future development.

The prospect of the monastery is one development that pleases her; she's now part of an advisory panel helping the order with the purchase of the property.

The site is not without its challenges, however. American Cell Tower sought an abatement several months ago from the town of Paxton and presented documentation that the site was unbuildable. But Laracy says engineers have told the advisory group that the plan could work.

The purchase and sales agreement gives them five months to raise the funds to purchase the site.

Five months doesn't seem very long to this community of faith, which Br. Dennis says has seen so much remarkable help in this endeavor. It's also not long compared to the permanent nature of the monastery.

"We're going to be residents of Paxton for hundreds of years," he says. "We're here to stay."