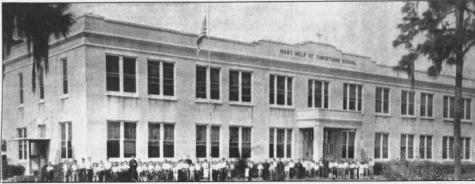
<u> History/Heritage</u>



Students and teachers gather in front of the school some time in the early 1930s.





Alicia Gonzalez Neve donated the land and start-up money for Mary Help of Christians School.

'A piece of heaven'

School started as refuge for homeless boys

Mary Help of Christians School, commemorating its 60th anniversality, owes its beginnings to a woman who gave virtually everything she owned to help homeless children.

Alicia Gonzalez Newe, widow of Tampas first dentis, decided in the 1320s that the worldly wealth she to found an opphanage that would provide an educational boost for young boys.







Mary Help relies on its own fund-raising

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eighth grade in 1931.

Now there are 125 students — half day-students, half boarders. According to Father Alvin Manni, director of development, the school's "more controlled environment and smaller classes" attract youngsters.

Then as now, Mary Help concentrated its classes from sixth through eighth grades. In the '30s, many of the students could not go on to high school. The need for shop classes to teach trades became evident. Printing, woodworking and automobile mechanics were added to the curriculum in the mid-1930s. Today, "shop" is restricted to printing, while the school looks for part-time instructors in the other trades.

Versaggi left Mary Help for the Salesians of Don Bosco seminary at Newton, N.J.

"I appreciated what I had experienced so much that I wanted to do something for other children, too." He found familiar faces there. Father Alvin Pedrigotti, who had been director at Mary Help of Christians, went to serve at the seminary, also. And Mrs. Neve visited Newton, too.

Mrs. Neve's support of the orphanage extend-

ed further. She founded the Mama Margaret Guild, named for the mother of St. John Bosco and an inter-parish Tampa support group.

In 1938, she took another step that aided young girls. Her tiled home on six acres was turned over to the Salesian Sisters for use as a school. Villa Madonna della Neve began as a school for disadvantaged girls and later became a private school.

Unexpected benefactor

In Mrs. Neve's final years, unable to care for herself, she resided at Villa Madonna, and the sisters looked after her. She died in February 1852 in her 80s.

Mary Help of Christians had another early unexpected benefactor. In the spring of 1932, someone asked boys at the crphanage to pray at the grave of Anna Pitsch in nearby Myrtle Hill Cemetery.

Her husband, Gustav Pitsch, happened to see the youths praying. He was touched by their tribute and told them, "I'll come to see you."

Pitsch visited the school a number of times. After his death in 1935, Mary Help of Christians officials learned the school was a beneficiary of half of Pitsch's estate. The new funds enabled construction of the Anna Pitsch Memorial Building to house more boys.

Once isolated in its country setting, the school now is jostled by development on all sides as Tampa's urbanization moves eastward.

Some years ago, the fathers spotted builder stakes "less than a stone's throw from our courtyard." Father Manni, then director, quickly began negotiations with the developer.

Mary Help wound up buying 10 acres, then an additional 42 acres, as a buffer.

Conversely, the school sold a less strategic 50 acres of its property to the developers of the Beltz outlet mail. Funds from that sale helped bolster the school's financing.

Originally under the jurisdiction of, and assis-

Originally under the jurisdiction of, and assisted by, the Florida Roman Catholic diocese when it was an orphanage, Mary Help of Christians is now a private institution, dependent upon its own resources.

A foundation has been formed to build an endowment to aid students. About 70 percent of the students now attend on a reduced rate of tuition. But "everyone is treated the same, regardless of background," Father Manni said.

Once a favorite charity when it was "the only orphanage in town," Mary Help of Christians now relies on its own fund-raising for much of its income.