



NEWS RELEASE

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'Room at the Inn' Nativity Display Returns to St. Matthew Center for Health on Dec. 5 and 6

Did you grow up with a nativity scene displayed in your home? When you think of nativity scenes, do you imagine the traditional Italian crèche?

The eighth annual "Room at the Inn" nativity display will once again provide a stunning visual reminder that the "Christmas Story" — as illustrated in nativity scenes — does indeed have many expressions. Susan Greeley of Oak Park has spent the past 30 years collecting nativity scenes from all over the world. On December 5 and 6, Susan will once again display her spectacular collection, which now totals 325 nativities, at St. Matthew Center for Health in Park Ridge. The exhibit will be open from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. both days. St. Matthew, a program of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), is located at 1601 Western Avenue in Park Ridge.

"I hope visitors will be struck by God's overwhelming love and generosity by seeing the way other people and other cultures imagine the nativity," Greeley says. She adds that many visitors return each year to see the display and say it gives them a wonderful sense of peace and inspiration in a troubled world.

For Susan and her husband, Pastor Jeff King, the time it takes from their jobs and personal lives is a gift from them to the community. She says, "The set-up actually takes longer than the number of hours the display is open. But it's worth it to see the delight on people's faces, adults and children alike. It's such a wonderful feeling to know that other people are enjoying these crèches as much as we do."

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Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

For a third year, groups of students from area parochial schools will be coming to see the display during private viewing hours on Friday. They will be told about the nativity scenes and take part in a nativity scavenger hunt. Children from Christian Heritage Academy in Northfield will sing for St. Matthew's residents after seeing the exhibit.

The tradition of the nativity scene, or crèche, dates back to 1223. St. Francis of Assisi is said to have been traveling to the Italian village of Greccio at the time, when the sight of shepherds in moonlit fields evoked images of the first Christmas. Inspired, he beckoned villagers that Christmas Eve to light the sky with their torches, bring their animals and re-enact the nativity. During succeeding centuries, the tradition spread from Italy to the rest of Europe and beyond. Today, many Christian families annually display a crèche, often one that has been handed down from generation to generation.

Susan Greeley, who has traveled extensively, says, "I bought my first nativity scene in 1980 when I was living in Bogota, Colombia." Throughout the years, her collection has grown through gifts she receives, as well as through her own purchases. Almost every one of the nativities has some kind of story behind it. Susan will be at St. Matthew to meet visitors and answer questions about the collection.

While viewing this beautiful, inspiring exhibit, guests may register for a free chance to win a nativity set of their own. Children will enjoy the "Please Touch" table and may also participate in a separate drawing to win a set that appeals to them. Light refreshments will be served. The event is free and open to the public. For more information on "Room at the Inn," call 847/825-5531, or visit www.StMatthewCenter.org.

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About St. Matthew Center for Health:

St. Matthew Center for Health, a program of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), was founded in 1959. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, St. Matthew offers rehabilitation services, long-term care, respite care and a specialized dementia unit. St. Matthew is located at 1601 N. Western Avenue in Park Ridge, two blocks south of Dempster Street and just south of Lutheran General Hospital.

About Lutheran Social Services of Illinois:

Founded in 1867, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. LSSI serves people through an array of services at 83 sites across Illinois. For more information about LSSI, visit www.LSSI.org.