

## Nativity is a living, breathing reminder of the meaning of Christmas

Written by STEVE PRISAMENT

Thursday, December 20, 2012 11:27 am

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GALLOWAY – With a live camel to help them over the hump, students and animals enacted the third annual live Nativity of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish Saturday, Dec. 15 at Assumption Regional Catholic School, 146 S. Pitney Road.

People could drive past or park and walk up to the Nativity, which featured sheep, goats, donkeys, a camel, and children portraying Mary and Joseph, kings, shepherds and angels.

There was plenty going on inside the school, too.

The festivities started at 5 p.m. (after 4 o'clock Mass at Assumption Church) with a tree lighting and the Assumption choir students singing and leading a procession to the manger.

The live animals came from Barnyard Friends in Dorothy.

Proprietor Nick Santana said they acquired the camel early this year, and it has worked out well, giving youngsters rides as well as participating in events.

Inside the school, there were carolers dressed in Dickensian garb from St. Nicholas Church in Egg Harbor City who are also part of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, three competition teams from Dance Forum South in Galloway, and the Holy Spirit High School Tri-M Music Honor Society Choir.

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The Atlantic County 4-H Train Club had a model setup that spread much of the length of the cafeteria.

Dinner was available for purchase including chili, pizza and hot dogs.

“It was a community event,” chairwoman Chris Bruno said. “We do not make money. The money goes back into the event.”

Costs include the live animals, she said.

“Animals are very expensive and people love the animals,” Bruno said. “And they must be trained. You can’t just go to a farm and borrow goats.”

She said the large crowd required placing events indoors, and some activities worked better inside.

“There were at least 1,000 people at peak times,” Bruno said. “The train display was very interesting. They said they got more people to see their exhibit in one night than they have for the season at Shore Mall.”

Dance Forum South, she said, was “the hit.”

“It’s quite an undertaking,” Bruno said. “It’s all volunteers; no professionals. The planning takes over five months. We have about 100 children volunteers and 50 adults.”

Food sales were up dramatically – about 50 percent over 2011, she said. That and an increased

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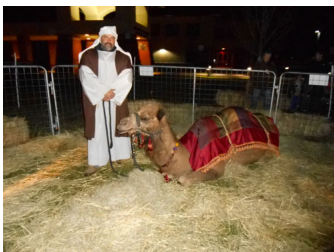
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number of phone calls helped her estimate the peak crowd number – up 200 from about 800 a year ago.

“There’s no admission,” Bruno said. “It’s not commercial. We had St. Nicholas instead of Santa Claus.”

Saint Nicholas greeted children and posed for photos with them.

“Our goal was to have a family bonding night for the community,” Bruno said. “I think we succeeded.”



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