

COAL COUNTRY HANGOUT YOUTH CENTER

Deacon Ann Staples has finally retired (!) from active parish ministry, most recently at St. Thomas Church in Northern Cambria. After 33 years of parish ministry, she felt tired but good, and still able to understand that deacons never actually retire, just shift emphasis.

With that in mind, she is still serving as Executive Director for Coal Country Hangout Youth Center (CCHYC), the full-service youth center that began in 1996 as a response to the educational, human services, and social needs of children and their families in northern Cambria County. The center targets a population of approximately 6,000 boys and girls, from infants to age 18, living in rural locales within four area school districts, eight boroughs, and seven townships that extend from northern Cambria County into northeastern Indiana County and southwestern Clearfield County.

The goals of CCHYC are:

- To provide affordable and accessible child care to all families in our community;
- To emphasize that families can forever influence their children and that we support families to the greatest extent possible in the promotion of healthy behaviors among their children; and
- To provide a holistic approach to educational, cultural, and spiritual devastation experienced by families in the region.

Under Deacon Staples' direction, the center's experiential educational component has explored local history, and participants have constructed large ceramic and stone monuments at crucial places along the Kittanning trail across Cambria County. Between 2011 and 2016, the local school districts served by CCHYC designed, created and constructed four large monuments.

Now in 2018, with the 32nd experiential education component, participants continue to delve into the region's past. ARTzKAMP 2018 explored 300 years of the Kittanning Path through puppetry. Students in grades four through six created puppets depicting the French and Indian wars in a two-week long trek involving history and art. They reenacted the story of the conflict between the native Lenape people and the British settlers that took place in our backyard over 260 years ago. They created a variety of different types of puppets such as shadow puppets, hand puppets, stick puppets, and masks, to bring history to life. Performances scheduled during the 2018 Heritage Day represented the results of their efforts.

