

Church donates parts to help restore Orchestra Hall's organ

By JULIANNE MATTERA
Special to The Oakland Press

Roughly 80 years ago, 8-year-old Jean Ostroski and her family stepped through the doors of the old Central Woodward Christian Church in Detroit for their weekly Sunday morning church service.

Inside the cathedral church's tall, stone walls, the Casavant organ's powerful music led the congregation through the service. And to this day, music remains an essential part of Ostroski's

church, now located in Troy.

"The sound was just magnificent and our organist was excellent," said Ostroski, who now lives and Troy and works as the church's historian. "It was always very, very important and wonderful to me. We had these talented people who played it and these talented people who put it together. And the sounds that came out of it, were just magnificent."

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ORGAN

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Back then, the congregation was 1,200 strong, but with dwindling numbers, the church relocated to a much smaller Troy-based sanctuary in 1978. The beloved organ console and its many pipes — some of which measured 19 feet long by 11 inches in diameter — came along as well.

"They had a heritage of magnificent music down in Detroit when they were down there," said Patrick Kuhl, the church's minister of music who called the Casavant the "Rolls Royce" of organs in its heyday. "They had some of the finest direc-

tors and organists of their time," he said. "And when they moved out here, that tradition continued."

Music is so important that the Sunday service is built around it, Kuhl said. And he regularly meets with the minister to coordinate the sermon and the hymns to be sung at church.

"If you looked at our service, it isn't just like sing three hymns and now we say 'Amen.' It's continually interwoven through the service," Kuhl said. "So there are about five or six hymns, three responses, all purpose-driven."

The songs are chosen for their text and how they fit with the theme of the Sunday morning service, Kuhl said.

So when the Casavant organ began to wear out, the Troy-based church was in need of an economical replacement to continue the tradition of

music. The church decided on a digital Allen Organ — one that uses speakers to mimic the sounds of pipe organs — and the congregation had to consider where the larger pipes and old organ console would go.

Like Ostroski, many church members have an emotional connection to the old Casavant organ. And the congregation was happy to learn that their organ console and pipes could find a home at Orchestra Hall, Ostroski said.

"We are delighted because it is, in a sense, part of the organ going back home," Ostroski said. "It's going back to Detroit from which it came rather than just putting it in the ash heap or selling it pipe by pipe to whomever. It is going to be used for a purpose." In the next couple years, the con-

sole and larger pipes from Central Woodward Christian Church will be used to help restore the Orchestra Hall organ, which dates back to 1924.

Rick Helderop, president and owner of Helderop Pipe Organs, hopes to restore the Orchestra Hall organ back to its original condition. Helderop will be using the old church's console to help fill in needed replacement parts for the Orchestra Hall console, and the large pipes from the church's organ are being considered for an antiphonal division in Orchestra Hall.

Since both organs were built around the same time and were voiced by the same organ tuners in Detroit, Helderop thinks the pipes will blend perfectly with the original Orchestra Hall pipes. "It is going to be a wonderful addi-

tion to the Orchestra Hall organ," Helderop said. "It will be as if it was always there."

While the Troy church has been enjoying the new organ's range of contemporary sounds, the pipes kept from their original Casavant organ still remind them of their Detroit-based heritage.

"The wonderful thing is that we hooked up," said Kuhl of the well-timed connection between Orchestra Hall and the Central Woodward Christian Church. "The pipes are being returned downtown into a sister building of the same size where it will be heard by hundreds of thousands of people. So the organ these people invested in originally, it's not dead. It will always be alive now."