

Churches plan benefits for student workers

By Bethany Hooper
Associate Editor

(Oct. 18, 2024) Two local churches are partnering to raise funds for an international student program.

Now through December, St. Matthews By The Sea United Methodist Church will be selling wreaths to raise funds for the International Student Outreach Program (ISOP) at Holy Savior Catholic Church in Ocean City. Anne Hodges, point person for fundraising activities at St. Matthews, said the effort is a way to show appreciation for the students who support the local economy each summer.

"We think it's definitely a worthy cause," she said. "They come with hopes and aspirations and work so hard for us all summer, we thought it was a good opportunity to give back."

In the early 2000s, Anne Marie Conestabile launched ISOP – a program to help J-1 students – through her church, Holy Savior on 17th Street and Philadelphia Avenue. And in 2005, St. Matthews in Fenwick Island began supporting Holy Savior's ministry by providing funds and serving meals to hundreds of international students, multiple times each summer.

"It's so remarkable what a wonderful support system that St. Matthews

is for our free dinners," Conestabile said. "They have about 125 volunteers from their church that take students to the store, to the hospital, come to dinners, serve, and help clean up. They provide financial support as well."

Conestabile said Holy Savior feeds between 500 and 600 students a week, in addition to its popular Christmas in July dinner celebration, which attracts more than 1,000 students. But feeding hundreds of young adults adds up, officials say.

"Everything has gotten so expensive," Conestabile said. "Food and drinks are skyrocketing. So the expense is almost double what we used to spend for dinners."

At St. Matthews, the church's Neighbors Helping Neighbors ministry is partnering with Holy Savior to raise funds for the international student dinners, which Hodges said provides individuals a chance to receive free meals and prizes, as well as fellowship. She said those interested in supporting the international workforce can purchase live wreaths, swags and centerpieces through the Christmas Wreath and Holiday Greens Fundraiser. Arrangements range from \$35 to \$55.

"The prices are great, the quality is great, but the cause is tremendous,"

she said.

Hodges said those interested can place their orders online at giftitforward.com with the fundraising code "STMATTDE001" to have arrangements shipped directly to them. However, those interested in receiving a discounted rate can place an order through St. Matthews and pick up in person between Nov. 25-29. Online orders are accepted through Dec. 1, and in-person orders are due by Oct. 27.

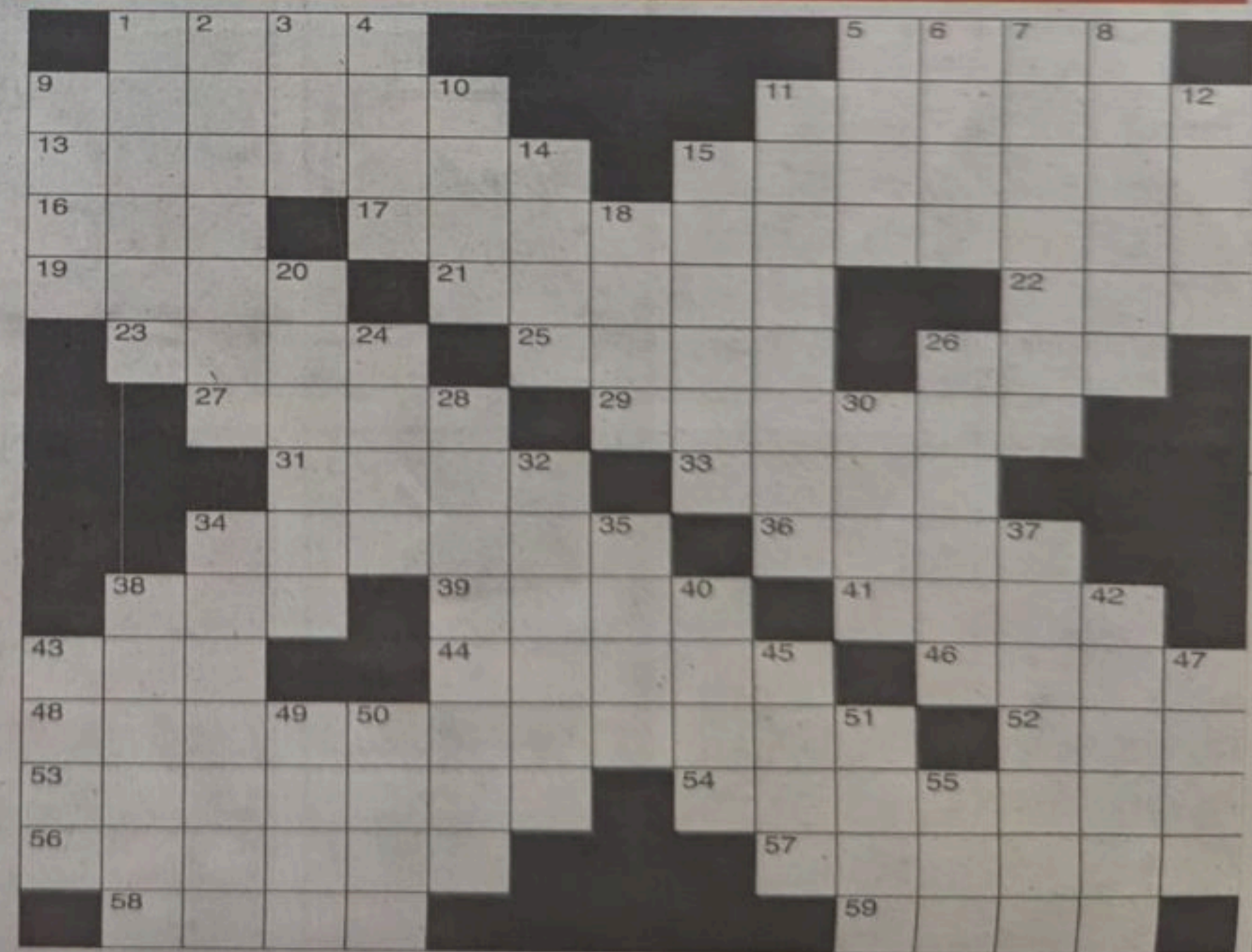
"They are decorated and last a long time," she said of the arrangements.

For more information, or to order through St. Matthews, call the church office at 302-537-1402, Monday through Thursday, 7 a.m. to noon.

Those who do not want to purchase an arrangement, but want to support the outreach program can make donations to St. Matthews, with "International Student Dinners" written in the memo, or Holy Savior, with "ISOP" written in the memo.

"We appreciate the students for being here and supporting our city," Conestabile said. "So it's a win-win situation for everybody."

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