

Adoption agency honored

By **JOSEPH PICARD**
TOMS RIVER BUREAU

BAY HEAD — Every weekend, the Rev. Paul Engle, a Capuchin friar, travels from his home in New York City to this Shore community, to celebrate Mass at Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church.

Churchgoers recognize him as a visiting priest helping out the parish. They may not know that Engle is also the founder and head of Downey Side, an award-winning adoption agency for older children.

"I started Downey Side 35 years ago," Engle said. "I'd worked as a chaplain in two county jails in Massa-

See **Adoption**, Page **B2**

Adoption

From Page B1

chusetts and saw that a lot of

young men and young women inmates came out of foster care. What they had needed were permanent homes. Eventually, I made that my mission."

Engle made his first

placement in Springfield, Mass., when a 16-year-old approached him about becoming a Capuchin. Engle saw that what the young man needed first was a home. At Mass, he made a plea from the pulpit for a home for

the boy. A woman named Margaret Downey came forward and adopted the teen-ager.

"He later went on to become a Capuchin," Engle said. "When I founded the agency, I named it after Margaret Downey."

Since 1967, Downey Side has grown from one office in Springfield, Mass., to 13 offices in six states. In that time, it has placed more than 6,000 youths, ages 7 to 17, in permanent settings. According to Matthew Chodash, director of development at Downey Side and a resident of Asbury Park, the agency's success rate is around 76 percent.

"Our philosophy is that every child has the right to a permanent and loving family," Chodash said. "Placing young people in loving homes is not an exact science. We screen and train our families very well."

The Dave Thomas Center for Adoption Law agrees. The center, located at Capital University Law School in Columbus, Ohio, was founded in 1998 with money from the Dave Thomas Foundation.

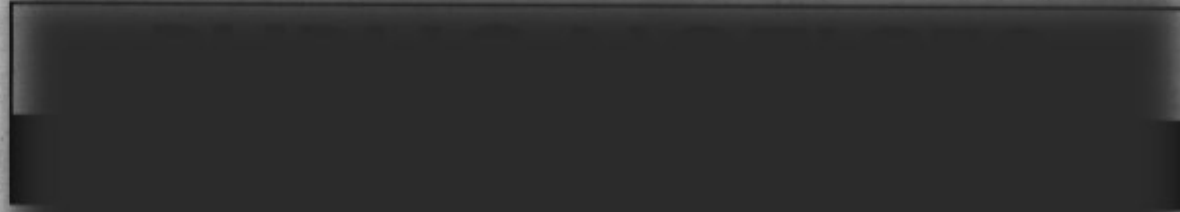
Founder of Wendy's Restaurants, Thomas, who died this year, was adopted and an advocate for children in need. Each year, the center honors institutions and individuals from across the country who have made special contributions to adoption and related fields.

For 2002, the center gave its Most Valuable Player award to Downey Side, and two other adoption agencies.

Chodash explained that the agency recruits families looking to adopt. Extensive background and criminal checks are run on the candidates, and they undergo a nine-week training period at a Downey Side office.

"These children often come with a lot of baggage and would-be parents need to be prepared," Chodash said. He added that there are approximately 530,000 children in America today without permanent homes.

Downey Side is nonsectarian and nonprofit. It operates on its contracts with state agencies, donations and fund-raising. "To do this sort of work successfully, you have to be dedicated," Engle said. "You are going to suffer in this world, so you should suffer for a good cause. It makes no sense that these children should be forgotten and become hurtful to society."



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