

Adoption agency's founder honored

By **CHRIS HAMEL**

Staff writer

SPRINGFIELD - Downey Side, an adoption agency founded 35 years ago in Springfield by the Rev. Paul Engel, will be honored March 5 in Ohio with one of the adoption field's most prestigious awards.

Engel, on behalf of Downey Side's staff, will receive the Most Valuable Player Award at the fourth annual adoption summit March 4-5 at the Dave Thomas Center for Adoption Law in Columbus, Ohio. The center is named for the late founder of the Wendy's restaurant chain.

Engel, a Catholic priest, who is



Rev. Paul Engel

work on adoption issues.

Engel commented from Downey Side's headquarters in New York. The nonprofit, nondenominational agency has 13 offices in six states, including its original base here at 999 Liberty St.

"I view everything I get as a tes-

Downey Side's mission director, said the award will be bestowed at a luncheon March 5. He characterized the center as the "leading private institute nationally" at

tament to our (approximately) 40 employees, who work diligently and with commitment to waiting children," Engel said. "I'm accepting that award for all the staff."

Downey Side began in 1967, when Engel placed a 17-year-old boy in the Springfield home of Margaret F. Downey, a teacher, who worked, during a 40-year career, at Cathedral High School, Chicopee Comprehensive High School and the former House of Good Shepherd, West Springfield. She died in 1999.

Engel said Downey Side, since its founding, has placed more than 6,000 boys and girls in adoptive homes. The agency is devoted exclusively to recruiting families to adopt American boys and girls,

aged 7 to 17. Engel said about 500,000 American children are seeking adoptive homes.

A native of New York's Bronx borough, Engel, 64, is a Capuchin Franciscan priest, who came to Springfield in 1966 to serve at the former St. Francis Chapel on Bridge Street. He worked here 17 years.

He noted that the residents of Springfield "really helped this (agency) grow," through their monetary donations and other support.

He declined to identify by name the 17-year-old who was the first youth placed. But he noted that the boy later became a Capuchin brother and now teaches in Guam.