

SANDY'S UNSUNG HEROES

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

William A. Donohue

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, we need something to cheer about, especially as we approach the holiday season. I bring you good news, but first a word about some bad news.

Never have I encountered more devastation to life and property from a storm than what Sandy wrought. Some made matters worse by looting and price gouging (of gas and other items). New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg cared more about his Marathon than he did tending to the people ravaged by Sandy and it took several days before the generators in Central Park were moved to Staten Island. On the other hand, there were countless incidents of people who went out of their way to help those in need. Let me share one with you.

Vinnie Muldoon came to the U.S. from Ireland in 1986, first to Boston then to Long Island. A middle-age married man, he has a soft face, a steely determination, and a huge heart. Take the latter. After Sandy hit, he got his crew of some 30 men, mostly Catholic, to restore homes damaged by Sandy *at no cost*. This selfless act was not an anomaly: when a woman unexpectedly lost her husband last year, leaving her and her children economically crippled, Vinnie and the boys gathered neighbors together for a fundraiser that brought in a boatload of money.

Old World Quality Corporation, the Garden City, Long Island company Vinnie founded in 1994, is not like most entities in the home contracting business: they specialize in restoring old homes, and building new ones that resemble old homes. Ever thankful to America for the opportunity of experiencing a "rags to riches" story, Vinnie wants to give back. Most of those in his business, he says without a trace of anger, just

want to earn a living. He wants to do that as well, but it is not enough.

Whenever there is a dire weather forecast, Vinnie contacts his current and former customers asking if they need help prior to the onslaught of the storm. He means what he says. To wit: if Jones was one of his customers two years ago, he gets serviced for free, even if there was no intervening contact.

The source of Vinnie's virtue is traceable to his parents, Fintan and Kathleen Muldoon. The youngest of ten, Vinnie learned at an early age that "the greatest and simplest set of rules to live by are the Ten Commandments." He certainly puts those rules to work in his business. "If you are in a position to help people," he says, "and you have the resources to do it, it is the right thing to do."

Vinnie says with earned pride that the "vast majority of people who work for my company feed off the energy and example that I set." One of those who most exemplifies what Vinnie stands for is Mike Denny, a veteran member of his staff.

Mike has a rugged look but a gentle interior. He not only looks tough, he has the strength to break most men in half. But his outward appearance masks a sensitivity that manifests itself in a myriad of ways. To be exact, Mike is the kind of guy who wouldn't think twice about rescuing those in need. Indeed, he has done so many times, without bravado. So when Vinnie asks his crew to help those in trouble, Mike never lets him down.

Not surprisingly, Mike speaks highly of Vinnie. For 35 years, Mike has worked for "good guys and thieves," but never with anyone like the man from Galway. Though Vinnie can be demanding—Mike calls him "The Hammers of Hell"—he credits him with always being fair.

So what motivates Mike to be so selfless? Like Vinnie, he cites his parents, as well as the Ten Commandments, for

imbuing in him a strong work ethic and a commitment to the least among us. But there is also something else that they share: both have a strong animus against the prevailing “sense of entitlement” that marks our society.

Liberals love to deride “rugged individualism,” but when it is they who are the ones in need, they don’t summon wimps. They call on guys like Vinnie, Mike and the rest of the crew. So when Mike says he loathes people who are “lazy and greedy,” he speaks the language of a man driven by a much maligned work ethic.

Not without reason does Mike say our society is rife with people who won’t do anything to help others, unless there is something in it for them. Ever blunt, he opines, “You can’t write off volunteering.” This is not the voice of selfishness; rather, it bespeaks an altruistic impulse, one inspired by his boss.

Mike was happy on Election Day, though it had nothing to do with the electoral results. At the end of his workday, he reflected on what had just happened. “It made it all worthwhile to see the smile on her face,” he said. He was referring to the woman, handicapped since she was a child, who was serviced that day by Vinnie’s staff. “You can’t put a price on someone’s life,” Mike concluded. Amen to that.

Our society would be a better place to live in if there were more men like these, but, alas, there are not. Regrettably, we have gotten colder as a people. But when we do see examples of self-giving, we need to trumpet it loudly. Virtue, like vice, can be contagious.

Merry Christmas!