

Elf 'hunt' to benefit mentally disabled

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MICHIGAN CITY — Leprechauns ordinarily hoard their pots of gold, but the gnomes are not so elusive they can't be caught.

On Sunday, hidden deep within the green of 184 acres, guests will have the chance to snare a wee one and take his treasure.

"When you get a hold of a leprechaun, you get a pot of gold," said Rev. Dennis Blaney of Michigan City's Sacred Heart Church and founder of the Share Foundation.

The foundation is sponsoring the Northwest Indiana Leprechaun Hunt, a fund-raiser to support Sharing Meadows, a semi-independent living community for mentally disabled adults just off U.S. 20 between Michigan City and South Bend.

Besides traditional Irish food and entertainment, there will be 13 hidden leprechauns with stickers attached to them that will net their finders from \$50 to \$100.

The "hunt" will last from noon to 6 p.m.

Blaney said the concept for a semi-independent living community developed over a 10-year period after he had observed the need for housing for this population. The Share Foundation used to sponsor summer camps, he said, and "on one occasion we took them to a rural area and I could see their eyes glisten."



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Rev. Dennis Blaney stands outside one of the houses in Sharing Meadows, a semi-independent living community between Michigan City and South Bend, where there will be a fund-raiser Sunday.

This led to a hunt for land and money to secure it. That came together in 1991 and the acreage on U.S. 20 was purchased. A planning firm was hired to design the community.

To date, three houses have been built. Each unit will contain two clients and one staff person. Right now, seven people are occupying the houses. Eventually, Blaney hopes to construct nine houses at a rate of three houses every two years.

A camp craft building is nearing completion on the farm and a cottage industry will be set up to keep the residents productive and

provide a portion of what Blaney said will be a substantial ongoing budget.

"The days here will hopefully be spent in peace ... as they live throughout the different seasons," Blaney said.

The foundation has planted about 2,000 trees, including black walnut, oak, ash, cedar, pine, cherry and apple. To show how far-reaching Blaney's plans are, he talks about what the trees will look like and produce a century from now.

At this setting Sunday, the project will be given a boost by a celebration of Irish entertainment:

bagpipes, comedians, Irish dancers, celebrity guests and Irish bands.

In addition to the hidden leprechauns, a marked fish hooked in the small lake will fetch \$200.

Irish cuisine is included with admission. Roast lamb, corn beef and cabbage with all of the trimmings and "all the food that you want," the priest said. "Also beer, wine and soda ... and plenty of anything else."

Tickets are \$50 for adults and \$15 for children ages 13 to 18. Children under 12 will be admitted free. For more information or to make reservations, call 872-2866.