

RINGING OUT A FAMILY TRADITION

By **BRENDA BARBOSA**
STAFF WRITER

Norris Harding is the modern-day man in the bell tower. True, the New Brunswick man doesn't have the crooked gait or meager existence of Victor Hugo's tragic hero. He isn't trapped in isolation or madly in love with a gypsy woman.

No, Harding has a funky red sports car, a bright smile and a hobby not too many people have.

For 15 years, Harding, 32, has climbed the rickety steps leading to the dusty bell tower at St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church on Somerset Street to make sweet music.

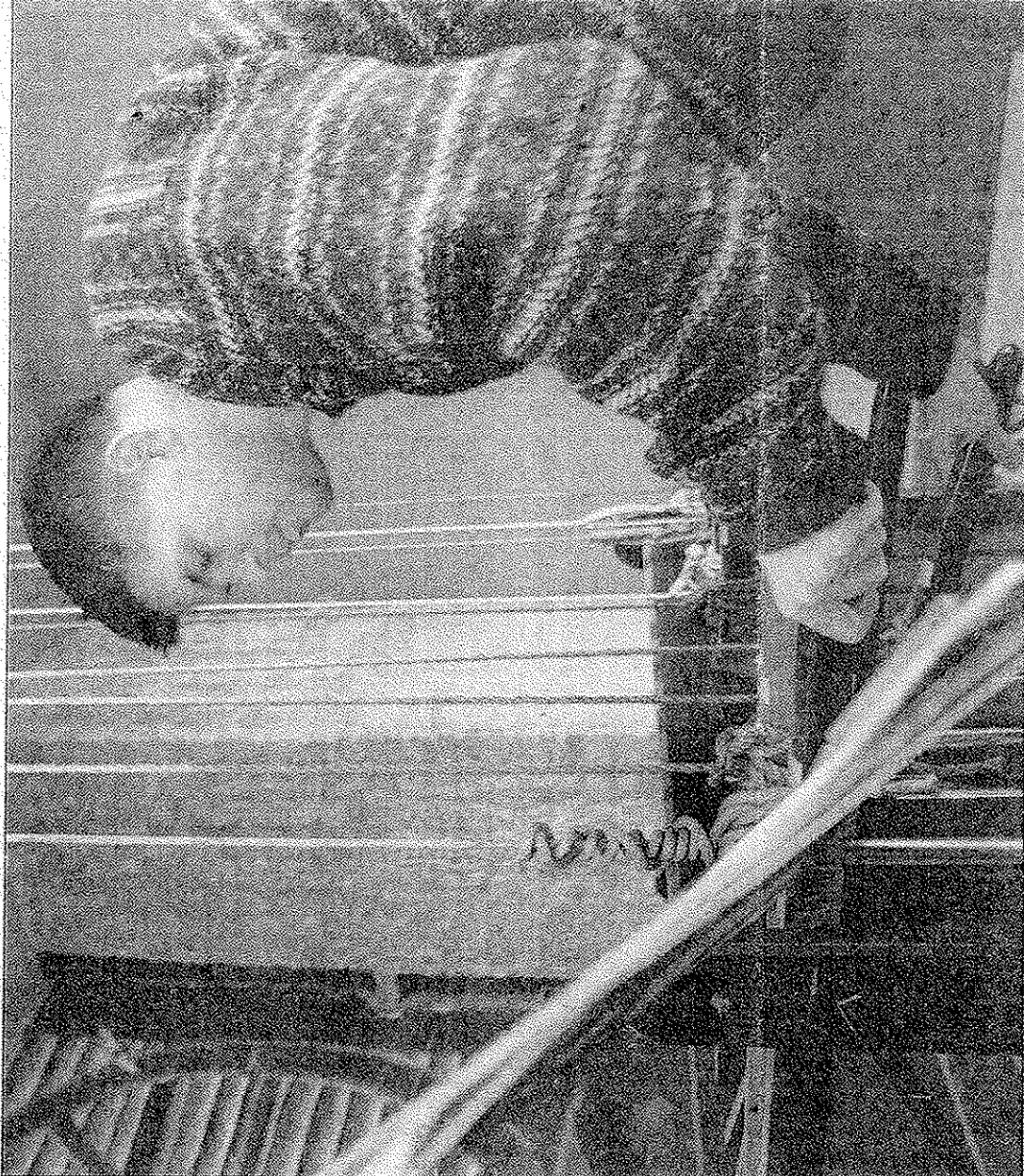
"They say all surgeons are in some way artistic," said Harding, a second-year resident at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and a former choirboy. "I guess this is my way of

“ I'm it. When I'm not around, they don't get played.”

Norris Harding
BELL RINGER

showing it.”

High in the church's steeple hang nine copper bells. Yards of frazzled rope stream down the middle of the tower connecting the clappers to a “keyboard” some 50 feet below. Dangling from thick wooden beams, the bells look old and tired, not exactly the mighty instruments cast in New York and hoisted into place in the late 1800s.



OFFICE IN ACTION

Workers gift swap yields to aid effort

By **DIANE HERBST**
STAFF WRITER

About a decade ago, the faculty and staff at Rutgers' Center for Government Service, tired of spending money Christmas gifts for off-mates.

They wanted to put the dollars to work. So they set up a gift swap. The idea was simple: members of the staff would bring in a gift for someone else. The gifts would be distributed to the needy.

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY



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P.A.S.S.

ding summons the bells alive. Pushing down hard on the wooden keys, eyes fixed on a yellowing piece of sheet music, Harding cranks out the notes to "Come All Ye Faithful."

Down below on the street, curious passers-by gaze up at the tower, almost startled by the powerful sounds that cut through the chilly air.

"It sounds lovely," chirped one woman.

Tired and out of breath — yet clearly enjoying the attention — Harding turns to a reporter who had schlepped up the skinny stairs to watch him play one afternoon, and with a slight smile asks, "Any more requests?" Without waiting for a response, he rings out another tune.

Indeed, playing the bells is something Harding loves to do. It's a tradition that has lived in his family for several generations. His grandfather used to tug on the heavy ropes with his bare hands before Harding was born, and his older cousin played during midnight mass.

"I used to sit on the steps and watch my cousin play," Harding said. "I just thought it was the coolest thing."

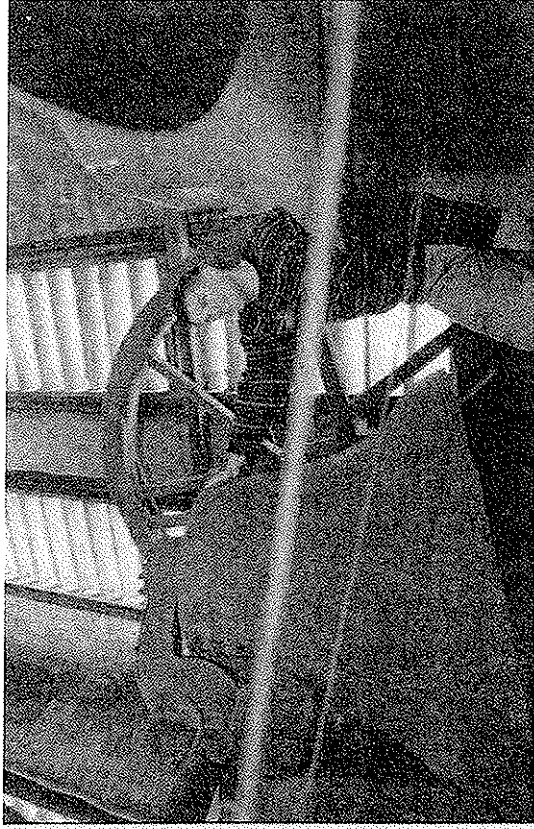
Over the years the tower's graying walls have been carved with initials, some belonging to members of the Harding clan. On one wall, a wom-

Photo: Patricia Korman. Photo by the writer.

Aside from Christmas spirit, there were some practical reasons to get the ramp done now.

"We had to do it right away, especially with the snow and ice," said Lisa Lang, who spearheaded the project. Lang, who lives across the street, usually

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JASON TOWLEN/staff photographer

● Norris Harding practices playing the bells in the bell tower of St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church in New Brunswick recently, top and above right. Harding, shown with the bells, is the third generation of his family to play the bells.

an's face, sketched in black chalk, watches over the keys.

"Who put her there?" asked the porter.

"It was there even before I got here," responded Harding. "But I wouldn't put that in the article."

Harding hasn't been able to play

much lately. His hectic schedule hasn't allowed it, and that bothers him. He fears once he stops playing there will be nobody to take his place.

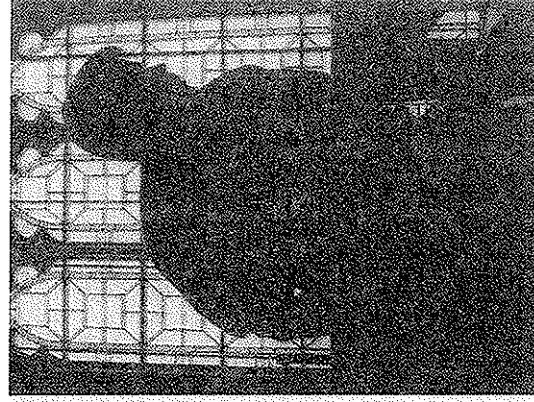
"I'm it. When I'm not around, they don't get played," Harding said.

"I tried to get (my two brothers) to

do it, but they have other interests."

There's another problem he's worried about, too. The bells and their carriage are old and haven't been repaired since they were installed more than 100 years ago. The ropes

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kenedy Ave., east for donations. The Needy Cases Fund of the Home News Tribune, in addition, from the staff of office gifts. This year's was \$245.

"It makes more sense than to buy somebody something they don't need; it's a better use of our money," said Lir Guardabascio, department administrator of the Center part of the Edward J. Blostein School of Planning and Public Policy in New Brunswick.

The center provides continuing education classes for local government officials.

Almost every year, a different staffer takes over the duties of collecting the money.

This year, it was the turn of Jackie Zelinka, Program Development Administrator. Guardabascio noted that Center staff doesn't design a specific case when mail in their check. "We just do," she said.

Police Sgt. Leo Armentani doesn't like to be remembered as a rooge this season. Two weeks after ticketing a woman who was with Amboy woman who was ticketing toys bound for needy chil-

ent writing the summons.

"We were dumbfounded," said Winkler, who along with her mother and sister tried to persuade the officer not to give them a ticket.

He said he issued the summons because the van had been there

developer's contribution

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money was paid on time. The borrower is losing interest income it could be earning by investing the \$240,000, he said.

As long as the borough maintains

Lipkis has been hospitalized since October for complications related to an intestinal viral infection and is not expected to be released until after the holidays, said Shults. From his hospital bed, Lipkis has been working on securing financing from private lenders be-

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issued to toy-collection van

GEORGIA EAST
STAFF WRITER

BELLS

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break constantly and he's patched up several already.

"I would hate to see them go or go mechanical," Harding said. "It's really rare to see bells that are still played by hand. A lot of churches use remote controls these days."

Harding said he has been working with the church to raise money for the needed repairs.

He guesses they would need about \$20,000 to \$30,000 to get the bells back into shape.

In the meantime, Harding plans to enjoy their sound as long as he can. Tonight he will play "starting at about 10 all the way up until midnight Mass."

"I'll be up here, probably in jeans and a T-shirt working up a sweat and loving every minute of it," he said.