

**St. Rita in the Desert Catholic Church, Council 14230
Transition from School to Work (TSW) Program Support**

Fifteen years ago, a relationship was forged between the Vail School District's Transition from School to Work (TSW) program and St. Rita in the Desert Catholic Church. At that time, TSW was a fledgling transition program for high school students participating in special education at Cienega High School. The program sought to help students develop work skills while connecting them with various support agencies and potential employers for their transition from high school to their lives beyond high school. One of the first student work crews established was the landscape maintenance crew and their very first customer was St. Rita's. A young parishioner from the parish was a member of this landscape maintenance crew and his father happened to be a member of St. Rita in the Desert Council 14230.

Quickly, a friendship between the Knights of Columbus Council and TSW developed out of this original work arrangement. Every fall, the Knights hold their Tootsie Roll Drive to benefit people with Intellectual Disabilities. Students with Intellectual Disabilities are some of the very students served by the TSW program, so the friendship became a true partnership. For more than a decade, staff members and students from the TSW program, now a district-wide program operating at all five of Vail's high schools, have participated with the Knights in their Tootsie Roll Drives. St. Rita's Knights, in turn, gift Vail's TSW program with a portion of the proceeds from these drives. While TSW is partially funded by the state and the school district, the contributions from Council 14230 augment that funding, which enables TSW to expand existing work experiences, such as with the Vail Depot Thrift Store, Resource Food Bank and making their own adobe bricks. Vail residents appreciate that their donations to the Knights stay in the Vail community to help teach and develop the very students who will become the community's new adult citizens.