From the Monday, January 12, 2009 edition of the Kankakee Journal:

A funeral Mass for Pauline I. Africano, 84, of Kankakee, was celebrated Jan. 10 at St. Patrick Catholic Church. The Rev. John Peeters officiated. Mrs. Africano died Dec. 31, 2008.

From the Wednesday, January 7, 2009 edition of the Kankakee Journal (w/photo):

Visitation for Pauline I. Africano, 84, of Kankakee, will be from 10 a.m. Saturday until the 11 a.m. celebration of the funeral Mass at St. Patrick Catholic Church, where she was a member. The Rev. John Peeters will officiate. Memorials may be made to the family wishes. She died Dec. 31, 2008 at Riverside Medical Center. Clancy-Gernon-Hertz Funeral Home, west Kankakee, is in charge of arrangements. Mrs. Africano became executive director of the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) after her husband passed away. She was born May 11, 1924, in Bradley, the daughter of Henry and Jennie Burton Menard. Her husband, Tony Africano, whom she married Nov. 16, 1940, at St. Joseph Catholic Church, Bradley, died Jan. 31, 1972. She was a graduate of Bradley High School, where she was active in starting many sporting activities through the CYO. She received an associate degree in business management. She had been secretary of the United Way. She enjoyed sewing, cooking and was very artistic. She also enjoyed caring for people. Surviving are two sons and one daughter-in-law, Tony and Cathie Africano of Bradley, Rick Africano and his fiancee, Rose Mazur of Kankakee; one daughter, Sandra Guisto of Kankakee; six grandchildren, Tony Africano, Kari Africano, Misti Africano, Jessica Morales, Mia Williams and Rick Africano Jr.; nine great-grandchildren; one sister, Rita O'Connor of Herscher; and two brothers and one sister-in-law, Melvin and Lucille Menard and Jerry Menard, all of Bradley. Deceased are her parents; two grandsons, Marc Anthony Guisto and A.J. Africano; three brothers, Paul, Bob and Jim; and two sisters, Theresa and Madonna. Please sign her guestbook at clancygernon.com. (Pd.)

From the Kankakee Journal, By Mike Frey, Metro Editor of The Daily Journal, posted Jan. 05, 2009, 10:52 am:

Pauline Africano had a positive influence on countless people from the Kankakee area, and I am fortunate enough to count myself among them. Unfortunately, I never properly thanked her, and now it's too late to convey the message directly. Pauline, who ran the Catholic Youth Organization for a 40-year period from 1952 through 1991, died Wednesday at the age of 84. A death notice appeared in The Daily Journal Sunday, and many who knew her learned of her passing at that time. They likely reacted the same way I did when hearing the news a few days before -- they wept. While growing up in Kankakee in the 1970s, I was among many children who constantly visited the CYO. I can still remember the winter day in '72 when I first encountered Pauline. My mom was off to do some grocery shopping at the old Rudy's Thrift-T-Mart, and she gave me a few bucks and dropped me off at the center on East Merchant Street. I wasn't in the door more than a minute when Pauline greeted me. She sat and talked with me as I ate lunch, and then periodically checked on me as I shot baskets in the basement gym. When my mom

returned at the arranged time, Pauline followed me out to the car and told her I behaved well and was welcome back any time. Even at the tender age of 9, I was struck by the woman's kindness. As I grew older, I came to understand Pauline treated everyone that way. Although I have probably been a poor substitute, I have tried to treat people the same way Pauline did. Her impact on me continued into adulthood. While still in high school, she gave me a job keeping score at the peewee basketball games played in the CYO basement gym each Saturday, and when I was fresh out of college, she gave me the job of program director for the grade school athletic programs supervised by the CYO. It was one of three jobs I held at the time, and perhaps, what I remember most is Pauline's determination to keep me fed. She figured I had little time to eat because of a hectic schedule, so she would often have a couple of hot dogs ready for me when I arrived at the center. More importantly, she put me in charge of something at a young age. The confidence she instilled in me by doing so is of priceless value because she helped me believe I could serve as a leader. There has been little contact with Pauline over the last several years, even though I often drove by her home near the Meadowview Shopping Center. Each time I thought to myself, "How is Pauline getting along?" But I never stopped to check on her. I never knew how much her health suffered in the final years. That is part of the reason her death drove me to tears. But such regret is avoidable for all of us. The next time you think about someone who has made a difference in your life, take it a step further and make contact and thank them for all they have done for you. It will do you some good, but it will mean even more to the person you are thanking. I wish I had done as much for Pauline when the chance existed.

From the Kankakee Journal, By Mike Frey, posted Jan. 05, 2009, 10:50 am:

Countless kids helped by Pauline Africano You often hear talk about how kids need father figures in their lives. They need mother figures, too, and Pauline Africano made it her life's work to fill that role. "Pauline," as young and old alike knew her, died Wednesday at the age of 84. She spent the better part of her life running the former Catholic Youth Organization on Merchant Street in downtown Kankakee. She shared the duties with her husband, Tony, from 1952 through 1972. After he died in '72, she took over as executive director until 1991. During that time, she touched countless lives. Bill Spriggs, now 63, is one of them. He hailed from a single-parent home. His mother and grandmother primarily raised him, but they received help from Pauline from the time Spriggs was 9 and walked into the CYO for the first time. "Before day care was fashionable, she was day care," Spriggs said of Pauline. "Pauline was like a second mother and a social worker. A kid like me could have gone bad, but she didn't let that happen. My story has been repeated thousands of times." Back in the 1950s, the CYO was the center of activity for kids in the city. The Friday night sock hops would draw hundreds of junior high and high school students. Pauline's gentle touch complemented her husband's gruff approach to his job as the self-appointed bouncer. Together, they made it the perfect place for kids to gather -- so many that Spriggs recalls the line for the sock hops stretching around The Daily Journal building in one direction, and around the Knights of Columbus building in the other. "The CYO was 'Happy Days,' 'Leave it to Beaver' and 'Eddie and the Cruisers' all wrapped up into one," he said. "It was so

wonderful for all of us." Woman of vision Pauline was always willing to go to bat for the kids she mentored, including John Wade, who was 15 at the time. When Spriggs entered the U.S. Army for a tour of Vietnam in 1964, he chose Wade, one of his former players on the St. Rose Grade School boys' basketball team, to take over coaching duties. But administrators were wary about giving that responsibility to someone so young, at least until Pauline intervened on his behalf. "The monsignor didn't want me because of my age," Wade said. "But Pauline went over there and talked to him. She put in a good word for me and I got the team." Her vision continues to pay dividends for the community. Wade has coached a variety of sports over the past 40 years and is one of the most-recognized youth volunteers in Kankakee County. Her foresight also helped advance the opportunities for girls to play sports. Pauline started a CYO softball program in the 1950s, some 20 years before the federal government enacted Title IX, the law that gave girls the right to play interscholastic sports. In a 1997 interview, Pauline recalled how she recruited nuns to throw batting practice to the girls. Spriggs said when he returned from Vietnam, the CYO was one of the first places he visited. Pauline provided a home away from home when he was a boy; she continued to do it for Spriggs as an adult. Pauline put him to work as a referee at CYO basketball games. When Pauline retired, Spriggs became the director of the Independent Athletic League, the successor of the CYO program. Whether he was officiating or organizing tournaments, Spriggs abided by the principles taught by Pauline. "You could expect two things from her: fair play and correct guidance," he said. "She was all the things that spelled good."

A memorial visitation for Pauline Africano will be held from 10-11 a.m. Saturday at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, 428 S. Indiana Ave., Kankakee. A funeral Mass will begin at 11.

From the Kankakee Journal, By Mike Frey, posted Jan. 05, 2009, 4:27 pm:

Africano children had to share parents with others The children of Tony and Pauline Africano had to share their parents with others. As sons Tony and Rick and daughter Sandy shared family memories around the kitchen table Sunday, the fondest recollections came from their parents' willingness to help others. Pauline died Wednesday at the age of 84. Her husband preceded her in death by 36 years. The couple spent a combined 40 years operating the old Catholic Youth Organization in downtown Kankakee with Pauline continuing in the job for an additional 20 years after Tony passed away. It's anybody's guess how many kids they helped. Pauline second-guessed herself shortly before her death, when she asked Sandy if she felt neglected and unloved because her mother was involved in the lives of so many others. Sandy dismissed the notion outright. "I said, 'Oh, I'm so proud of you.'" As boys, the Africano brothers took notice of their parents' desire to help people who needed it most. Rick said they simply couldn't fathom the idea of a boy sitting in jail, so they were often called by someone in need of bail money. The Africanos always obliged, and when the kid wasn't allowed to immediately return home, Rick or Tony would have to move over so the guest had a place to sleep. The family lived on North Indiana Avenue during the 1950s, and Tony would notice persons of unkempt appearance gathered near the back door of the house. Initially afraid,

he one day worked up the courage to approach one and ask him what he was doing. Tony learned the guy was a hobo who had jumped off a railcar as it passed on the tracks nearby. He told Tony his parents' name and address were scrawled on the inside of the car, along with a message that the hungry could get something to eat there.