

PREMIUM BUSINESS

## Catholic diocese investing in retreat center near BlueOval City

By [Jane Roberts](#), Daily Memphian

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**Steve Fracchia, pictured on Sept. 5, 2023, is the new director of the Catholic Diocese of Memphis' Our Lady Queen of Peace Retreat Center. (Mark Weber/The Daily Memphian)**

A spiritual fire has long burned in Steve Fracchia. As chief operating officer at Southeastern Asset Management, four or five times a week he'd leave the office and the billions of dollars it managed for the quiet of midday Mass, the sensory interlude that restored him.

After 16 years at Southeastern, Fracchia, 55, is now prepared to give the last 15 years of his career to the church.

As of Sept. 1, he is the director of Our Lady Queen of Peace Retreat Center, the 140-acre respite near Stanton, Tennessee, that the Catholic Diocese of Memphis has owned for decades. It has principally been used for weekend retreats.

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With the construction site for Ford’s BlueOval City only 13 minutes away, the diocese is now preparing for an onslaught of development in the area. By increasing amenities and programs, it is hoping to offer the influx of families an outdoor recreation area that happens to include a spiritual component.

“I definitely want to continue doing what they’re doing right,” Fracchia said. “They’ve created an amazing, holy place. It’s super clean and super well-maintained.”

With Bishop David P. Talley’s blessing, Fracchia’s off to make Our Lady Queen of Peace a magnet by adding Frisbee golf and a 100-yard, nine-hole chipping course, plus eventual summer camps, speaker events and one- or two-day retreats he plans to market to local employers.

“If you’re coming for a spiritual retreat right now, that’s 100% spiritual. I would love to get families out there and maybe it’s like 10% spiritual, 90% fun, and over the long term, their spiritual life grows because of that,” Fracchia said.

Besides the panoramic beauty of rolling West Tennessee woodlands, the focal point is the retreat center, which features 24 private rooms in a long wing off a



**Catholic Diocese of Memphis’ Our Lady Queen of Peace Retreat Center on Sept. 5, 2023.** (Mark Weber/The Daily Memphian)

high-ceilinged atrium with a mammoth brick fireplace. The building, which opened in 2005, also includes a chapel large enough to seat 100, an industrial kitchen, dining area and several breakout rooms.

On top of the recreation pursuits, Fracchia will also be marketing the property as a wedding venue.

“You have a chapel with a tabernacle. You have your dining area. You have the beautiful outside area. Obviously, you can sleep a lot of guests. I think destination weddings are a no-brainer.”



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The property was donated to the diocese in the 1980s by Memphians William and Marianne Schadrack, members of St. Louis Catholic Church and close friends with then-Bishop Daniel Buechlein.

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“The thinking was, it would help everyone in the diocese to have a retreat center,” Marianne Schadrack said. “Bishop Buechlein wanted a retreat center. We came up with this.”

Her husband started Manufacturers Consolidation Services, a logistics business here, in 1968. He died in 2003, shortly before the retreat center was built.

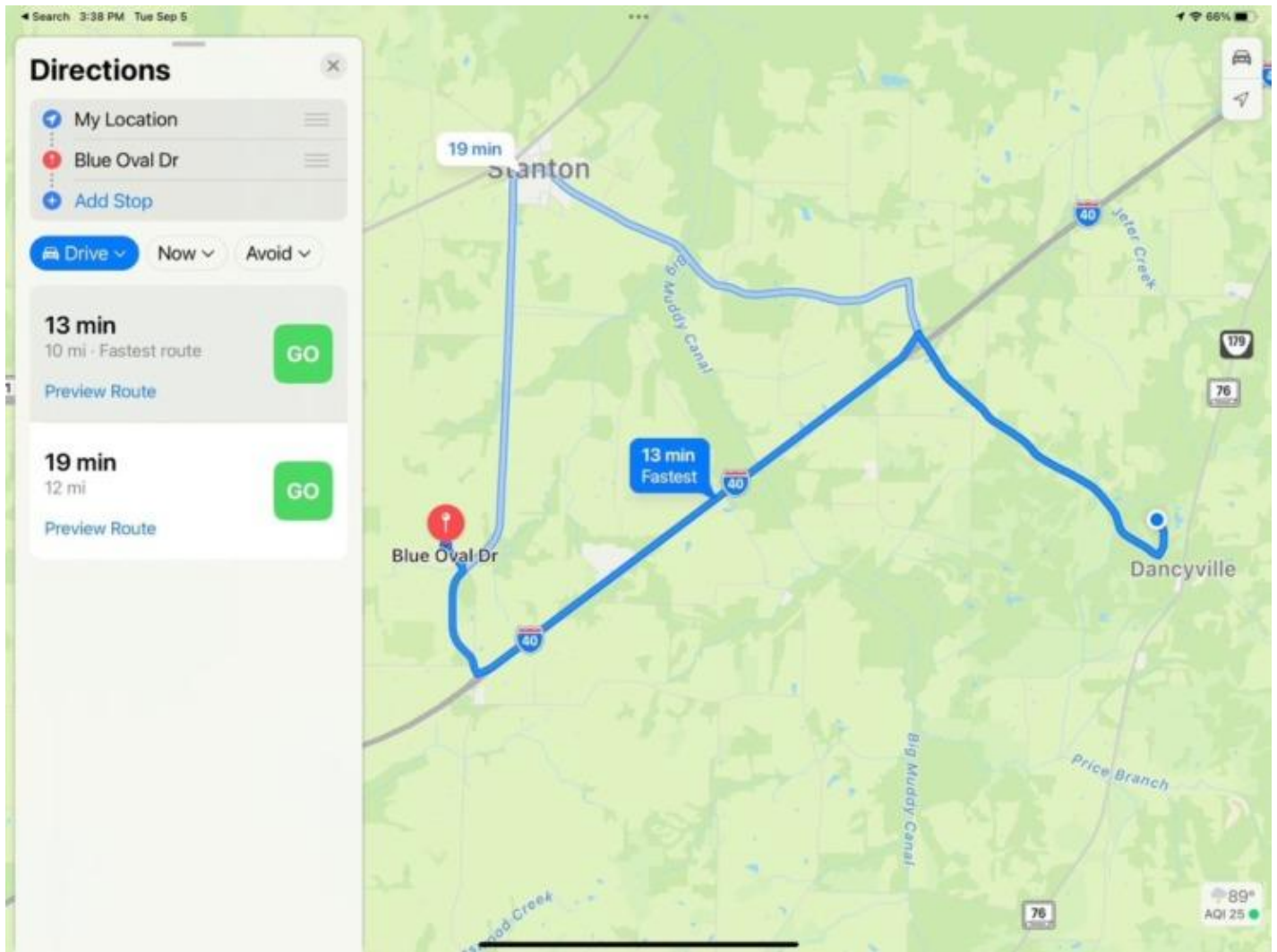
“We looked at lot of different places,” she said. “The bishop liked the placement of this property, so we bought it.”

The idea was to create a retreat center that would be easily accessible to all the parishes in the 21-county diocese.

Schadrack has heard the diocese expects the land will become more valuable and wants to do more to use it.

“I am happy it is going to be really used,” she said.





**Our Lady Queen of Peace Retreat Center, listed in Dancyville here, is 13 minutes from Ford's BlueOval City construction site off Interstate 40. (Courtesy/Steve Fracchia)**

Fracchia began his transition from Southeastern Asset Management in March, working remotely while also studying his spiritual options.

“I just had one prayer. It was ‘Hey, God, what’s my highest and best use for you, for the rest of my career?’”

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In early June, he saw the diocese’s ad for a part-time interim director at the center.

“That’s weird,” he said to himself. “I love that place. I’ve been up there for years, and it’s just an amazing, beautiful place.”

A week later, he knew he had to follow up.

On Tuesday, Sept. 5, Fracchia's second full day on the job, he was overseeing a crew pouring concrete for outdoor grilling areas. He is also mapping five miles of mowed hiking trails and creating social media promotions.

The immediate challenge, he said, is convincing Memphians that Stanton is nearby.

"One of the first things I did was map out the time and distance from every Catholic parish in Memphis, which is pretty representative of Memphis in general," Fracchia said.

"It was under 50 minutes for almost everybody. So, a big thing that people have to get educated on is, it's not that far away. It's just as far for me to drive from Germantown to FedExForum."

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Father Robbie Favazza serves the Catholic Church of the Resurrection in Fox Meadows and is spiritual director of Cursillo in Memphis, an international movement designed to help Christian laypeople become effective faith leaders. For years, the group has hosted three-day retreats at Our Lady Queen of Peace.

"I'm very hopeful with Steve taking it over. I know he has tons of plans of how he wants to reach out to younger people, families," Favazza said. "But with BlueOval coming in, you're going to have a lot of people moving into the neighborhood. With that area expanding, it's really in a prime position to grow and get bigger."

The first formal event is Nov. 4. Fracchia is expecting 100 to 200 people for Camino a la Paz, which translates "into the way to peace." He's planning short hikes amid the trees and birdsong, a way for people to commune with nature and imagine a more peaceful society and world.



**Catholic Diocese of Memphis' Our Lady Queen of Peace Retreat Center on Sept. 5, 2023.** (Mark Weber/The Daily Memphian)

“The bishop will celebrate Mass at 5 p.m. At 6 p.m. we’ll have a Eucharistic procession — that will be the hiking part,” Fracchia said.

“We want to emphasize this is not about a political agenda. This is not about gun control. This is not about gun laws. This is about prayer. This is about prayer for peace.”

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Fracchia hopes the event will grow to be the signature day at the retreat center, a pilgrimage like Camino Santiago in the Basque country in Europe that ends at the grave of St. James in Spain.

“Obviously, the name is Our Lady Queen of Peace. It’s a holy place. We definitely welcome all people of goodwill.”

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#### **Jane Roberts**

Longtime journalist Jane Roberts is a Minnesotan by birth and a Memphian by choice. She's lived and reported in the city more than two decades. She covers business news and features for The Daily Memphian.

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