

Actor whiles teen years away behind stage

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Until his voice becomes deeper and his body a little bigger, actor Gracen Porreca may have to work behind the scenes instead of on the stage.

The Bishop Kearney sophomore noted that he spent the first 11 years of his acting career playing such cute roles as Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* and the bird Woodstock in *Snoopy*.

Puberty, however, has wreaked havoc with the 15-year-old Porreca's voice, rendering it less endearing to audiences than his heretofore high-pitched intonation. Few roles in local productions call for adolescent actors unless they can be made up to look like adults, the student mused, commenting that he's not tall enough to convince an audience that he is getting on in years.

"There's not really a part for a kid this age," he said. "It's like the waiting period."

Rather than bemoan his temporary unemployment as an actor, the student thespian is drawing on his previous stage-managing experience at Beam's Theatre to manage Actors & Others' production of *Crimes of the Heart*.

Porreca has been spending his weeknights at the University of Rochester's Todd Theatre, coordinating the use of the play's props, directing sound and lighting, and cuing actors' lines.

Such work comes easily to the stage veteran, who, in addition to his theater roles, has appeared in a TV commercial, films for Kodak and Bausch & Lomb, and in the role of Larry in the PBS television series *Fins, Feathers and Fur*, produced by Rochester's WXXI.

"I've met older people who haven't done as much stuff," Porreca said. "I've done so much, it's like second nature."

Making *Crimes of the Heart* second nature has been the goal of its cast, he noted, because on Oct. 15 the group will fly to Ireland for a two-week run in Waterford. Actors & Others was invited to the Emerald Isle by the Red Kettle Theatre Company, which staged a play in Roches-



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Bishop Kearney sophomore Gracen Porreca drills a door to a frame for the Actors & Others' production of "Crimes of the Heart." Constructing scenery is just one of Porreca's many tasks as stage manager for the theater group.

ter last year with the assistance of Trish Ralph, Actors & Others' director.

Porreca was lucky enough to be included in the upcoming jaunt to Ireland. Nonetheless, he'll have to keep up with his studies when he leaves. "I didn't think it would be this time consuming," Porreca commen-

ted.

The hours spent in the theatrical world are worth it, the student remarked. "You still meet a lot of friends in the theater. I like to do different theater groups," he said.

Yet, despite his love for the theater, Por-

reca has no plans to make acting a career.

"The whole system is pretty weird," he said. "There are so many actors out there. Not too many get to the top. I'm not looking for the big letdown. I'm just looking to have some fun and meet new people and portray different characters."

Teens say Bush message lost on youths involved with drugs

By Ines Pinto Alicea
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — President Bush's drug talk, televised from the White House Sept. 12 to the nation's schools, touched students who don't use drugs, but youths who use or sell drugs probably weren't affected, said a 14-year-old Catholic school student.

"They don't care what people think," said Lynn Leandre, an eighth-grader at St. John the Baptist School in the Diocese of Brooklyn. "They're just in it for the money."

Leandre said her classmates appeared to be very interested in what the president had to say. Bush commended her school in June for being a "drug-free oasis in a sea of crack dealers" when he honored 47 Drug-Free School Award recipients.

"He did a very good job (in the speech)," she said. "I just hope he keeps his promise and helps those kids out. Drugs are the reason many people die around here."

In the speech Bush appealed to the youths to reject drugs, assuring them that saying no to drugs "won't make you a nerd, won't make you a loser."

The 15-minute talk was the latest round of an anti-drug campaign. On Sept. 5, Bush unveiled a \$7.9 billion package to fight drugs with more prosecutors, more prisons and stiffer sentences for drug sellers and users.

Leandre said the neighborhood around her school was infested with drug dealers. "It's scary sometimes because you think they're gonna go after you," she said.

"Every day you see people coming out of crack houses."

The administrators and teachers at the Catholic school are the reason why the school is drug free, she said.

"They treat you with respect and they trust you," she said.

Joe Kruger, 11, is a sixth-grader at St. Pius X-St. Leo School in Omaha, Neb. He said he was not surprised by the president's comments because he knows the drug problem is serious because of what he sees in the news.

"If you don't control the drug problem, it's gonna get out of hand and it's going to keep going on," Kruger said of Bush's comments that the "the day of the dealer is drawing to a close."

He said his class was very affected by the story the president told of Edward Byrne, a 22-year-old New York City policeman killed by drug dealers in 1988 while protecting a witness in a drug case.

"It really got people's attention," Kruger said.

Father Stephen O'Brien of the National Catholic Educational Association said it was a good idea for the president to speak directly to the students, but he felt that from his own reading of the text, the speech itself was not strong enough.

The president needs to place more of an emphasis on rehabilitation and on bringing values back to schools, he said.

"Once someone gets into drugs, no school is going to be able to help them," said the priest, executive director of NCEA's Chief Administrators of Catholic Education.

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A: _____

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