

Montour Falls youth inspires parish through faith, music

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ODESSA — You know those Army commercials that implore you to "be all you can be"?

Dave Dougherty may never serve in the armed forces, but he lives out that slogan about as well as anybody you'll ever meet.

Church organist. Concert performer. Singer. Active in his church youth group. Loves to travel. Loves to make new friends.

That's a pretty full load for any high school senior, but it's an astounding one for the 17-year-old Dougherty. He was born with muscular dystrophy, has endured 19 major operations in his lifetime and wasn't even able to walk until the age of 11. His most recent surgery, about a year ago, was to reconstruct his right hand.

"If people only knew how hard it's been for him — it's amazing that he's able to do this," said Dougherty's father, David Sr., as he watched his son play away on his beloved synthesizer in the living room of the family's home in Montour Falls.

Dave has benign congenital hypotonia, one of 40 variations of muscular dystrophy. Most young MD victims are afflicted with duchenne, and normally don't live past the age of 25.

"I'm one of the fortunate ones, where I have (a type of MD) that doesn't make your body deteriorate," said Dave.

That statement is typical of his optimistic outlook to life. Dave's outgoing personality and sharp sense of humor make it virtually impossible for anyone not to quickly warm up to him.

"He's got a lot of spirit, and it brings everybody else up when they're down," said his friend Renee Riley, 14.

Dave began to smile after that statement. "You didn't think I'd say anything bad about you, did you?" Renee asked him. Dave replied, laughing: "I don't know, but I was plugging my ears!"

Such upbeat banter is common between Dave and his family (he also has a 13-year-old sister, Kari) and friends.

"He's always been outgoing; there's not much that holds him back," said his mother, Jeanne. "He wants to be a part of things, and we support him if that's what he wants."

"I don't know if courageous is the right word, but if I were in his position, I don't know if I could be as outgoing," said another friend, Megan LoPresti, 14.

Dave, Renee and Megan attend Odessa-Montour High School, and all are also involved in the youth group that encompasses St. Benedict Church in Odessa and St. Mary's of the Lake



Church in Watkins Glen.

"It always amazes me that David is capable in anything he does," remarked Nancy Roy, his youth group coordinator. "He has dreams and sets goals to obtain those dreams."

At Dave's home parish of St. Benedict, he has provided the organ music at Sunday morning Mass for the last six years. His keyboarding skills are further displayed in various local concerts over the summer; during one outing in Watkins Glen last summer, he performed for 600 people. Dave has also played during the Jerry Lewis Telethon on WENY-TV in Elmira.

"When I get out on my own, I'd like to play in nightclubs in Atlantic City," he said.

In addition, Dave sings in his school chorus and is a member of Praise and Power, an area Christian rock group.

Although he can walk short distances without crutches, Dave uses them most of the time to help him get around. He has endured operations on his hips, feet, hands and back. Still, he

has traveled to more than 20 states with his family and also earned his driver's license last summer — on his first try, he's proud to point out. He was recently accepted as a Rotary Foreign Exchange Student and is hoping to spend a year in Australia.

Of all his activities, it's his Rotary involvement that's been the most meaningful for Dave. He was a camper for several years at the Sunshine Camp in Rush, located just south of Rochester, and for the first time served as a counselor last summer.

"It got to be where most of my friends had duchenne and were a lot worse off than me," he remarked.

Dave's commitment to providing spiritual aid to friends such as these, he says, enables him to overcome his own frustrations of being an MD victim.

"In my own mind I have (frustrations), but I help that God put me on this Earth to help other people with handicaps understand why. I try to tell them that you have to go with what God gives you."

Seventeen-year-old Dave Dougherty (right) has been the organist at St. Benedict's Church in Odessa for the past six years. Dougherty (above) entertains fellow youth group members Megan LoPresti (left) and Renee Riley.

BK students to compete in WXXI's 'Brainstormers'

ROCHESTER — Four Bishop Kearney High School students will appear on WXXI's (UHF Channel 21, cable channel 4) television production of "Brainstormers" on Friday, Dec. 20, at 5:30 p.m.

Senior Joan Adamo and juniors Christopher Schultheis, Christopher Regan and Norma Holland will meet

students from Geneseo High School. Participants will be challenged with general knowledge questions.

Kearney's coaches for the team include Judy Shaw, vice-chairperson of the English department; and Julie Bishop, a 1979 Kearney graduate and chairperson of the math department.

Foundation seeks youths for tours this summer

ROCHESTER — Young actors and singers from throughout the Rochester area are invited to apply for summer performance tours now being scheduled by the Peace Child Foundation.

Applications may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope (52 cents postage) to Peace

Child/Rochester, care of Vicki Lewin, 52 Cornell St., Rochester, 14607. Those interested can also call 716/244-6759.

Interested youths must be between the ages of 12 and 19. Previous experience is not required. The foundation is planning tours this year to all parts of the world.

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