

FEATURE

Fourth-grader befriends Holy Family Somali girl

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — A little more than three months ago, Umi Abukar, 11, was living in a refugee camp in Kenya, one of thousands of people uprooted and displaced by neighboring Somalia's civil war.

Today, she's a fourth-grader at Holy Family School and considers classmate Whitney McClary a cherished companion. According to the school's staff, Whitney has escorted Umi to various classes and made sure she understood her lessons, all the while maintaining his position on the school's honor roll.

"He's my best friend," said Umi who is still learning English. She lives in Rochester with her mother and her extended family.

"I just tell her how to do our work and help her with her homework," Whitney, 9, said as he sat with his friend in the school.

The young boy is far too modest, according to Mary Ellen DiMarco, a fourth-grade teacher at Holy Family. Although all the students have helped Umi as she has adjusted to her new life, Whitney has done more than any student to attend to her needs, said DiMarco, who teaches language arts to grades four, five and six.

"He's really made her feel very comfortable and very welcome," she said.

Spearheaded by Kimberly Melville, a fifth-grade teacher who teaches science to Holy Family's intermediate students, Holy Family's intermediate staff nomi-

nated Whitney for a "Do the Right Thing" award from the Rochester Police Department. The awards, which are co-sponsored by area organizations and businesses, are given out once a month to various city students to recognize their good deeds, according to police officials.

Whitney received his award at a ceremony Oct. 24 in the city's public safety building. Also recognized was Megan Elise Campan, a first-grader at St. Ambrose School who turned in a ring lost by an elderly man to her schoolteacher.

In attendance at the ceremony were Whitney's classmates, family and teachers.

His parents, James and Edie McClary, noted their great pride in their son.

"I feel very special," said Edie McClary. "He's a really good boy."

Whitney's father added that the boy didn't quite understand what all the fuss was about.

"He thought it was normal helping her out, and he didn't want any special recognition for it," said James McClary.

But Melville noted that she felt it was necessary to recognize Whitney's generosity toward Umi.

"He's a wonderful child," Melville said. "He took it upon himself to make (Umi) his special interest. He took care of Umi to the point where she depends on him for special understanding. It's almost as if he knew what she felt."

What Umi has felt is not something most children in this country could imagine, according to those who know her family.



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer
Whitney McClary, right, shown with Somali refugee Umi Abukar, was awarded a "Do the Right Thing" award Oct. 24 for the extra help he gives to Umi.

Umi is one of seven Somali students at Holy Family, according to Sister Lorraine Burns, SSND, principal. Those students are members of the Benadirs, a minority group from Somalia that got caught in the crossfire of the civil war there, said Jim Delaney, program manager for Catholic Family Center's Department of Refugee and Immigration Services.

Delaney said that the United States has resettled 3,000 Benadirs in the last year, including 80 in the Rochester area. Although they sided with no particular

faction, the Benadirs' living areas have been battlegrounds and their economic success was resented by some Somalis, he said.

"They were essentially chased out," he said.

Abukar Mohammed Abukar, an uncle of Umi, said their relatives were scattered throughout various African nations. He added that the family is grateful to have a chance to come to the United States.

"Thank God we get this opportunity because of the government of America," he said.

NOVEMBER BINGO CALENDAR

SPECIAL PAID ADVERTISEMENT ■ CALL FOR HOLIDAY CANCELLATIONS

BINGO

SUNDAY	TIME	LOCATION	PHONE
6:15 pm	St. Stanislaus Church	1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester	716-544-9951
7:30 pm	Holy Family Church	1099 Jay St., Door M, Rochester	716-328-3110
7:30 pm	St. Boniface Church	15 Whalin St., Rochester	716-271-1468
7:30 pm	St. Rita Church	New Location: Knights of Columbus, Barrett Dr., Webster	716-671-1100
MONDAY			
7:30pm	St. Michael's Church	Corner S. Main & Franklin, Newark	315-331-6753
TUESDAY			
10:00 am	Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church	Bingo Palace, Rochester	716-467-2725
7:30 pm	St. Stanislaus Church	1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester	716-544-9951
7:30 pm	St. Helens Church	Gates Center Bingo, Westmar Plaza	716-235-1210
7:30 pm	St. Francis Xavier	316 Bay St. (School Hall)	(716) 288-9700 or 482-3211
WEDNESDAY			
7:30 pm	Holy Family Home School Assoc.	1099 Jay St., Door M, Rochester	716-328-3110
THURSDAY			
7:30 pm	St. Stanislaus Church	1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester	716-544-9951
FRIDAY			
7:30 pm	St. Margaret Mary Church	380 Empire Blvd., Rochester	(716) 482-9770
SATURDAY			
12:30 pm	Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church	Bingo Palace, Rochester	716-467-2725
7:30 pm	Good Shepherd Church	3288 E. Henrietta Rd., Rochester	716-334-3518

✂ CLIP & SAVE ✂

BINGO!

DeSales High School Bingo is moving to St. Francis De Sales School on Center St. starting Saturday, Nov. 2, 1996

Saturday - 7:30 pm
\$3000 Prizes
Starts December 1st

Sunday - 2:00 pm
\$840 Prizes

Monday - 7:30 pm
\$2200 Prizes

SUPER BINGO
Sat., Nov. 2nd - 7:30 pm
\$9000 prizes
5 - \$1000 Jackpots
6 - \$500 Jackpots

DeSales HS Bingo, Geneva, NY • 315-789-2295 • Pull Tabs & Refreshments