

ON THE MOVE

Beneath the surface

As a youth minister, Chris Guyette said she doesn't form opinions of youth-group members from their hairstyles or other appearance features.

"My feeling is not to see the hair, the (body) piercing, the clothes. The kids have to see that I don't judge them like that," said Guyette, who serves at St. Patrick's Church in Macedon.

However, she said, many teens may wear noticeable hairstyles precisely because they want to draw some sort of attention.

"They don't have confidence, and this may initiate somebody coming up to you so that you don't have to make the first move," Guyette said.

The question she poses is whether other people ever get to see the entire person.

"I strongly believe it's from the inside out that counts. Are you out to be an individual, or are you out to shock somebody?" Guyette remarked. "I always say that Jesus didn't make a difference because of his appearance. It was who he was, and what he said and did."

Guyette blames our culture for being preoccupied with hairstyles and other forms of surface judgment-making.

"Most people don't look beyond what they see," Guyette commented. She added that this tendency extends to "the house we live in, the car we drive, the clothes we wear, the sneakers we wear."

At the same time, Guyette said that she has worn her hair at different lengths over the years. In fact, her 16-year-old daughter, Michele Gammariello, has tended to wear short hair when Guyette's is long, and vice-versa.

"In some ways I wonder if she doesn't do it to be different, because she's compared to me a lot," Guyette remarked.

Hairstyles

The long and short of it



According to Chuck Johnson, teens who correspond with him in an Internet chat room "all think I'm pretty cool."

But they were also taken aback when he informed them about his hairstyle: straight and blond, down past his shoulders.



"They were surprised that such a nice person could be like that. They said if they didn't know me, they'd freak out," said Chuck, 18, from St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Hamlin.

Chuck added that many people have avoided him in the past because of his

hair, but he continues to sport this distinctive style.

"I wanted to separate myself from everybody else," Chuck said. "I kind of like standing out in a crowd."

Another motive, Chuck said, is to challenge other people to accept diversity.

"It's to make them realize that it's not what you look like that really matters. It's the way you act, and present yourself," Chuck explained. "If they would back away from me because of what I look like, then they're not going to be my friends anyway."

Chuck and other teens interviewed for this story said their hairstyles are meant to make some sort of statement — whether it be a protest against modern trends; a sign of unity for athletic teams; or simply to be different.

"I like doing something different before school starts. I don't like to look the same from year to year," said Sarah Marzulo, who had her hair cut very short and also had a "big blond streak" put through it just before her junior year at Aquinas Institute began.

Just for extra measure, Sarah has also changed her hair tint. "Last year it was almost blond, and now it's almost purple," said Sarah, 16. She added that her natural hair color is light brown.

On the other hand, Erika Szymanski is a natural blond whose straight hair extends past her waist. The style gains notice in public, she said, but not in the hallways at Our Lady of Mercy High School.

"I've walked into stores and had people comment on my hair, but it doesn't draw much attention at Mercy because I've been here so

long and people are used to it," said Erika, a parishioner at Church of the Resurrection in Perinton.

Erika noted that her style, which also includes wearing long skirts, is a throwback to an earlier era.

"I'm very much a traditionalist. I like it this way, so it doesn't bother me that I don't fit into the current lifestyle. This whole trend toward women in the workplace, they've been wearing their hair a lot shorter to express their freedom," Erika remarked.

Both long and short hair are acceptable at Mercy — but only to a point, according to Becky Plonsky, director of communications. Plonsky said that the all-girls' school requires hairstyles that are "tasteful and represent the school." Yet during the first week of school, Plonsky said, one female student showed up with a shaved head and another arrived with her hair dyed blue. Both were sent to the dean of students.

Back at Aquinas, a shaved head is not uncommon for Colby Khuns, 17, a senior. He crops his hair as close to the scalp as possible, something he has done since sixth grade.

"The football players like to do it," said Colby, a three-sport athlete at Aquinas. "It's more comfortable in the summer when you practice and the hair is inside the helmet." He added that some of his past teams have gotten short haircuts to reflect their unity.

Colby, who cuts his own hair by using shears and a double mirror, added that he also does it for the convenience.

"It's just easier. It's too hard doing your hair in the morning and stuff," said Colby, a parishioner at St. Lawrence Church in Greece.

Asked if his hair is an object of attention, he replied, "All the time. People just come up and feel it."

Under the Aquinas dress code, which disallows "excessive hairstyles," Colby's hair is considered acceptable — and, apparently, so is Sarah's multicolored hair. Sarah realizes that she might be pushing the dress code limits, but "nobody's said anything."

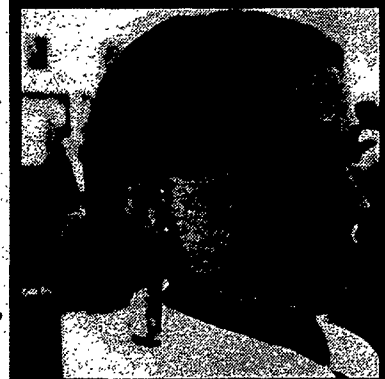
Meanwhile, Chuck, who currently attends Mesa Community College in Arizona, is not bound by any official dress code. But when he talked to the *Catholic Courier* by phone from Arizona, he wondered if life would be easier with shorter hair after a recent incident. He said he went to apply at a store that supposedly had job openings — but the manager took one look at him and said that all the positions were filled.

Now that he's of college age, Chuck admitted that he has less desire to continue wearing long hair.

"Basically, that's a high-school look," he said.

COMING NEXT WEEK:

Youth court in Elmira



Story by Mike Latona
Photos by Greg Francis



Should there be restrictions on hairstyles in schools or the workplace, or is this an infringement of individuals' rights? Voice your opinion about this, and other "On the Move" topics, by sending us an e-mail. We'll print selected responses in upcoming weeks.

E-mail us at cathcour@frontiernet.net. If you don't have access to e-mail, write us at P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y., 14624. Be sure to include your name, age and parish.

Hope to hear from you!