

DIOCESAN NEWS

Television celebrity elates, inspires his fans

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — "Happy" and "excited" were the words Andrew Bell and Teresa Tomion used, respectively, to describe their feelings upon meeting a television star for the first time.

Meanwhile, Barbara Carroll may never wash her hand again — Chris Burke had kissed it.

Bell, Tomion and Carroll traveled from Penn Yan Aug. 13 to meet Burke, star of the former TV series "Life Goes On." All four adults have a common bond: They live with developmental disabilities.

Burke appeared at Barnes & Noble Booksellers one day prior to the Heritage 5K Race in Webster, for which he was honorary chair. Proceeds from the race will benefit the Heritage Christian Home Inc., an East Rochester agency for developmentally disabled people in Monroe County.

More than 150 people — many with developmental disabilities — turned out at the bookstore's community room to meet Burke and get autographs. Burke is well-known to Bell, Tomion and Carroll from his acting on "Life Goes On," which aired from 1989 to 1993.

"All of them had watched the show faithfully," said Robin Hoppe of Catholic Charities. Hoppe works with Carroll and is also residence manager for Bell and Tomion at Penn Yan's Cramer House Individual Res-



Chris Burke kisses the hand of Barbara Carroll — who came with the Catholic Charities Penn Yan group home — at an appearance Aug. 13 at Barnes & Noble in Pittsford, where he signed a CD he made with friends.

idential Alternative.

Burke made history by becoming the first person with Down syndrome to be featured in a prime-time TV series. He continues to tour the country as a goodwill ambassador for people with Down syndrome, a congenital condition reflected by such characteristics as mental retardation, slanted eyes and a broad face.

Hoppe said that Burke's fame has in-

spired others with developmental disabilities to lead normal lives. For instance, she noted that Bell and Tomion have paid positions as kitchen workers at Keuka College.

"People with disabilities are just people, like us," Tomion remarked.

Burke — who will turn 34 years old Aug. 26 — engaged the gathering at Barnes & Noble with a barrage of waves, smiles and fist-pumping. He also sang and danced to

music from the professional duo of Joe and John DeMasi, who have known Burke since he was a child. One tune, the Beatles' "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" — the theme song of "Life Goes On" — had Burke encouraging participants to join in the chorus.

Burke fired numerous jokes. When asked what his motto in life is, he shouted "Eat pizza!" and drew a big laugh. He also offered: "Knock-knock. Who's there? Olive. Olive who? Olive you!"

And, when Burke revealed that he has homes in New York City and on Long Island, he began singing "Boy From New York City" and "New York, New York."

Yet Burke showed his serious side as well, saying he has overcome great odds to make it where he is today.

"I want you people to know if I can do it, so can you," he told the audience.

Burke is also serious about his Catholic faith. He said he regularly attends weekend Mass at his home parish, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, in Point Lookout, Long Island, where he serves as usher. He is also a former altar server.

"I think it's real important, being in God's house," Burke told the *Catholic Courier*. "I've always believed in God. He's the one who has given me the opportunity to do this. God gave me gifts from heaven, that's the way I see it."

In addition, Burke has guest starred on the popular show "Touched By An Angel." The series, he said, "sends a good message."

Administrator, pastor, teacher honored for serving schools

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

It's been six years since Sister Joseph Gilmory Russell, SSJ, left her position as assistant superintendent of personnel for the Department of Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Rochester.

But the diocese hasn't forgotten her service. It honored her with an award on May 7 at the Monroe County Catholic School Board's fourth annual "Celebrate Catholic Schools" dinner at Eagle Vale Country Club in Perinton. Sister Russell received the John Peter Medaille Award for systemwide service to Catholic education. Father Thomas H. Wheeland, pastor of Holy Cross Church in Charlotte, and a member of the school department's facilities committee, also received the award.

The Medaille Award is named for the French founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Father Jean Peter Medaille, SJ. Sister Russell was the first Sister of St. Joseph to receive the award since its inception three years ago.

Meanwhile, Joan Kelley, a former faculty member of Holy Rosary School in Rochester, who died in November 1996, was honored with the Elizabeth Ann Seton Award, named for the saint who started the first Catholic school in the United States. The award is given posthumously, according to Sister Anne Guerin, SSJ, the diocese's assistant superintendent for school advancement.

Sister Guerin said a number of Catholic educators were nominated for the three awards earlier this year by pastors and principals throughout Monroe County. A committee of school board members chose the three award winners.

Sister Russell began her teaching career in 1944 at Nazareth Model School in Rochester. She subsequently taught at three other Catholic schools successively from 1946 to 1960 — Mother of Sorrows in Greece, Our Lady of Lourdes in Brighton and Sacred Heart in Rochester.

Sister Russell said she fondly remembers her days as a teacher.

"I think teaching prepares you to administer," she said. "You learn the ropes. You learn how to relate with children and with parents. I learned that total availability was essential."

Sister Russell began her career as an ad-

ministrator when she became principal of St. Mary's School in Auburn in 1960, a position she held until 1966. From 1966 to 1975, she served as regional coordinator for her religious order before being named principal of St. Jerome's School in East Rochester, a position she held until 1986. In 1985, Sister Russell also served as diocesan assistant superintendent for elementary administration.

Sister Russell headed the Catholic schools' personnel office from 1986 to 1993. Her career as an administrator taught her many things, she said, among them, how to deal with people in difficult situations.

"Sometimes, people don't like to be completely upfront and honest," she said. "You like to take the easy way out, to avoid confrontation. But in the final analysis, honesty is the best road possible."

Since leaving the school system, Sister Russell has worked for her order, first as administrator of the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse from 1993 to 1998. Currently she is coordinator of St. Joseph Convent Infirmary, home to 80 sisters and seven diocesan priests.

The co-recipient of the Medaille Award, Father Wheeland, has also long worked for Catholic schools. For starters, his parish, Holy Cross, is home to a diocesan elementary school with 512 children, he said.

He added that he has held numerous positions on various diocesan schools' committees and boards, including his current ones on the facilities committee as well as the board of trustees at Bishop Kearney High School in Rochester.

"I've always served at a parish where we've had an active school," Father Wheeland said, noting he's been a priest for 33 years, and pastor of Holy Cross for 22. "I've always been proud of our Catholic schools."

Father Wheeland said he'd like to see the diocese focus on raising school funds from Catholic school alumni. Although a number of alumni have already donated to Catholic schools, he said, even more alumni would give back to the system that educated them if they realized, for example, that many community and business leaders graduated from Catholic schools.

Catholic schools also offer something public schools can't, he said — an education that can speak openly of religious values. To illustrate his point, he said the United

States was founded, in part, by people hungry for religious liberty, a fact Catholic schools can emphasize in great detail.

"A young person going to a Catholic school will have hopefully not only the facts taught to them as history, but also the faith and values that went into an event," he said.

The pastor added that he wholeheartedly endorses the diocesan emphasis on lifelong Catholic education. He pointed out that his parish has 320 children enrolled in religious education, and that it holds a number of educational events for adults. He quoted from his award acceptance speech to sum up his philosophy.

"Our actions must include a strong Catholic school system, a committed religion formation program and an exciting faith enrichment of our adults," he said. "We must recognize these three ministries not as alternatives one to another, but as the three legs of a tripod on which Christian formation in the new millennium must be built."

Christian formation of her students was a prime concern of the late Joan Kelley, according to her last principal, Mary Beth Fuehrer of Holy Rosary School. Fuehrer said Kelley taught second grade at Holy

Rosary from 1988 until she was diagnosed with cancer in spring, 1996.

Fuehrer added that Kelley was also principal of St. Salome's in Irondequoit from 1985 to 1988, and taught at St. Francis of Assisi School in her native Auburn in the 1950s before working at public schools in Rush-Henrietta and Rochester during the 1960s and '70s. During that time, Kelley, who held a doctorate in education, co-authored a reading series for the Rochester public school district, Fuehrer said.

She added that in addition to teaching children, Kelley taught summer education classes at Nazareth College in Rochester, and did volunteer work for such Catholic outreach programs as Melita House, which serves single pregnant women in Rochester.

Kelley went above and beyond the call of duty as a Catholic educator, Fuehrer recalled. If a student showed signs of physical hunger, Kelley made sure that student got a meal that day. Or if the student was poorly outfitted for school, Kelley would help the student find new clothes.

"She didn't just worry about 'Does he know his ABCs, his one-two-threes, and can he read,' Fuehrer said. "She was really worried about the child as an individual."

Jesus march, rally set for Aug. 21

ROCHESTER — Two related events on Aug. 21 are aimed at raising up Jesus' name in the community.

The Second Annual Jesus Rally at Highland Bowl will begin at 9 a.m., and the 10th Annual March for Jesus at 1 p.m. Marchers will join up later with the rally.

Both events are ecumenical.

The Jesus Rally is being organized by Mike Salamone, a former volunteer prison chaplain who attends Brighton Presbyterian Church and who heads the Free Rack Bible Ministry. The ministry distributes free Christian literature, he said.

Meanwhile, for the first time in its 10-year history, the March for Jesus has a Catholic serving as chief organizer. Karen Rapp, a parishioner at Sacred Heart Cathedral, said the annual march shows the community that Christians of all denominations can unite around their faith in Jesus Christ.

The Rally for Jesus will run until 9 p.m., Salamone said. The event will feature a free

meals as well as Christian music, clowns, dancers and public testimonies. He said that about 1,000 people are expected to participate.

Father Robert Werth, pastor of the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward — a cluster of St. Augustine, St. Monica and Our Lady of Good Counsel churches — is on the march's pastoral steering committee.

Rapp said about 2,000 people are expected to march from the corner of Highland Avenue and South Goodman Street to the Highland Bowl on South Avenue, where they will join the rally. March lineup begins at noon, and parking for both events is available at McQuaid Jesuit High School, 1800 S. Clinton Ave. Free shuttle buses will run from the parking lot to both the rally and the march's starting point.

The phone number for information on the Jesus Rally is 716/342-4808; and for the March for Jesus, 234-1522.

— Rob Cullivan