

Young Adults

Couple see beneath surface

ROCHESTER — For the most part, Kevin Beckford and his girlfriend, Linda Lillich, enjoy greeting fellow walkers in Highland Park and along the Barge Canal.

But there are also times that the hellos are returned with frowns. Though words are not spoken, Beckford and Lillich sense their outward appearance is the cause for the sour expressions: Beckford is African-American, and Lillich is Caucasian.

"I think you can tell when you get a long stare. They look through you like you're transparent," said Beckford, 35. "I've seen looks of curiosity, and I've seen disgust — that's the worst."

"It's like, they make a point to make eye contact with you. But they're not saying anything," added Lillich, 32.

The same holds true in restaurants, Lillich said, where some patrons' eyes become rooted on them. "It makes you feel a little uncomfortable because you know you're really being watched," she remarked.

"I say to Linda, 'Do you think I should tell them we're interracial, but not BLIND?'" Beckford chuckled.

"I just wish people could look beyond what they see, and get to know us as people," he added.

The couple met in 1995 through a young-adult group at Rochester's Corpus Christi Church, and their first date was in 1997.

They dated sporadically for several months before, as Lillich put it, "We knew we weren't going to just be friends."

Lillich, who grew up in suburban Rochester, said that race was never an obstacle in their decision to begin dating. "Between the two of us, (being interracial) doesn't cause any issues," she remarked. "As a young child I never had any issues around that, although in my own family diversity wasn't necessarily promoted."

Beckford — who was born in Jamaica and lived most of his childhood in the Bahamas before moving to Rochester at age 17 — said he had dated interracially in the past. In addition, he said, there were interracial marriages among his ancestors.

However, Beckford and Lillich have come to realize that not everyone can overlook skin color quite as easily. Though they're strongly supported by their current friends, Beckford said he did lose one friendship over the situation.

"From my perspective, if somebody couldn't get beyond it, they're not a friend of mine," he commented. He added that anyone who acts this way is not truly being Christian, remarking, "That's not saying 'We're supposed to love one another.'"

Beckford said he wasn't really aware that racism existed until an ugly incident when he was 18. One day he gave a ride to a white girl in his neighborhood, but she later informed him that this gesture was not to be repeated.

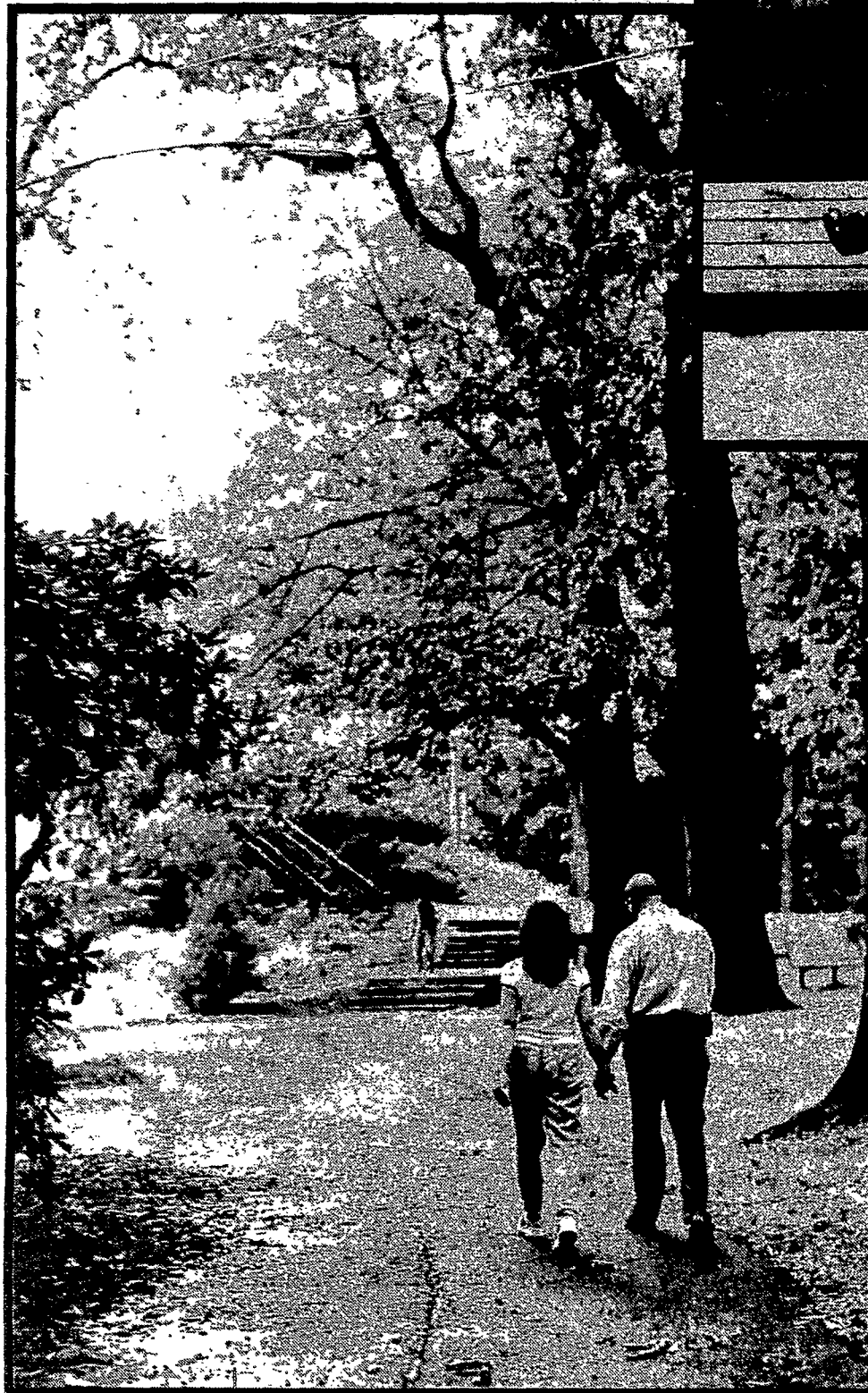
"She said, 'Oh, by the way, my father said that you can't drive me to school anymore — and to let you know that if he sees me with that blank-blank-blank again, he'll kill him,'" Beckford recalled.

"That was an eye-opener."

Beckford currently serves as manager of technical communications for Eastman Kodak Company. He said he's experienced subtle racism in the work force over the years, but by this time has learned to take a positive attitude. He said that the struggle has been worth it, because it has forced him to examine social attitudes more deeply.

"I think, in some ways, it's made me a better person and a child of God," he remarked.

On the other hand, though Lillich said



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Linda Lillich and Kevin Beckford, both of Rochester, walk through Highland Park on Sept. 23.

she tries not to let others' disapproval bother her, she admitted that it's not easy.

"I feel like to a degree you can say 'Who cares if they feel different,' but ..." remarked Lillich, a customer service representative at Nationwide Insurance.

Even so, Beckford said, they don't hold back on public displays of affection, such as holding hands. "If we feel moved to do it, we do it," he remarked.

Beckford and Lillich are parishioners at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish. After three years together, the couple says their relationship is the deepest

either has ever experienced. And, yes, marriage does appear to loom in the not-too-distant future.

"I think our friends are wondering why it's taking so long," Beckford said with a laugh. "I'm looking forward to surprising her (with a proposal) in some way, shape or form."

Marriage is a happily inevitable progression from Lillich's perspective, also.

"It really isn't an alternative, the thought of us not being together," she commented.

EVENTS

For information on these events, and to obtain RSVP information, call the hotline for Odyssey, the diocesan-sponsored young adults network, at 716/328-3228, ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375. Or, visit the Web site at www.ggw.org/odyssey. Odyssey events are open to Catholic 20s/30s (single and married) and their friends.

• **Saturday, Sept. 30:** "Maze Craze." Meet at noon at Long Acre Farms, 1342 Eddy Road, Macedon. Navigate a maze through a four-acre corn field! Event will be held in conjunction with Quest, the young-adult outreach for the Diocese of Buffalo.

• **Saturday, Oct. 7:** Ride the Maid of the Mist in Niagara Falls. Meet in the parking lot of Wegmans Ridgemont Plaza, Greece, at 8:30 a.m. to car-pool to the Falls.

• **Sunday, Oct. 8:** Church sampler: Our Lady of Mercy, Greece. Meet at 10:15 a.m. in front of the church, located at 36 Armstrong Road (corner of Denise Road) for 10:30 a.m. Mass. Brunch to follow.

• **Saturday, Oct. 14:** Ithaca fall foliage/wine tour. Odyssey will join young adult groups from Ithaca and Binghamton for the touring. Meet in the parking lot of Wegmans East Avenue at 8:30 a.m.

• **Saturday, Oct. 21:** Laser Quest. Beginning at 2 p.m. Laser Quest is located in Ridgemont Plaza in Greece.

• **Thursday, Oct. 26:** Dinner at the Elmwood Inn, 1256 Mount Hope Ave., Rochester. Monthly dinner begins at 7 p.m.

Second annual Halloween bash set for Oct. 27

The *Catholic Courier* and Odyssey, the diocesan young-adult network, will co-sponsor their second annual benefit Halloween dance for young adults (21+) on Friday, Oct. 27.

All proceeds will go to the *Catholic Courier*/Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal, which helps families and individuals facing financial emergencies. Admission is \$12 per person.

Festivities will run from 8 p.m. to midnight at the Webster Knights of Columbus. The hall is located on Barrett Drive, off Ridge Road (Route 404) between Holt Road and Route 250.

DiJames Tunes disc-jockey service will provide music for dancing. Pizza and snacks will be provided, and a cash bar



will be available. Costumes are optional, but prizes will be awarded for the best ones. In addition, there will be a prize awarded for the best-carved pumpkin brought to the party!

The Christmas Appeal has been a collaborative project of the *Courier* and diocesan Catholic

Charities since 1969. The appeal has helped provide a pool of money the various agencies of Catholic Charities use all year to help people who do not qualify for other forms of assistance, or

whose needs must be met before assistance begins.

The *Courier's* staff increased its involvement in the appeal of 1996, designing a new logo and organizing a dinner-theater event. Officials at Catholic Charities, Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation Inc. and diocesan Urban Services use the year-round fund to provide various goods and services for families in need.

Further information about the Oct. 27 dance is available through Odyssey, the diocesan young-adult network for Catholics in their 20s and 30s. Call 716/328-3228, ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375; Or, call the *Courier* at 716/328-4340 or 1-800-600-3628.