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Shane Healey (left) and his father, Wayne Healey, congratulate Robert Machi on receiving a Hands of Christ award. Shane also was a recipient of a Hands of Christ award.

A special award for a special student

Robert Machi is a young man with a seemingly endless list of interests.

At school, he enjoys sharpening his woodworking and sewing skills. He volunteers for the school newspaper and fundraising events. In addition, Robert is a versatile athlete who competes in baseball, swimming, soccer, bowling and track-and-field. He is especially proud of his successes as a Special Olympian.

"I've got nine trophies at home," Robert stated proudly.

A weight-training enthusiast, he rolled up his sleeve and flexed a bulging biceps.

"You haven't felt my handshake yet," he warned.

He loves attending such professional sports events as Rochester Red Wing baseball, Amerk hockey, and Rhino soccer. But where football is involved, you won't find him rooting for the Buffalo Bills: he's a Miami Dolphins fan, and took great delight in a Miami win over Buffalo in early October.

He's a big fan of James Bond movies and Beatles music. He enjoys the fine arts, having attended many major stage productions. At home he plays computer games and watches his favorite TV shows; "Dexter" and "Scooby Doo," on the Cartoon Network, top the list.

A lifelong resident of the town of Penfield, Robert is an altar server and active youth-group member at St. Joseph's Parish. He's well-known in his church and community, according to his mother, Kathleen.

"Rob is wonderful," she said. "Very cheerful, very pleasant. He knows everyone in Penfield; it doesn't seem like we can go anywhere without running into someone he knows."

Amid all his accomplishments and activities, Robert can now add a new feat to the list. The 19-year-old is the first student in the history of School of the Holy Childhood to receive a diocesan Hands of Christ award.

Robert is beginning his fourth year at School of the Holy Childhood, an educational center in Henrietta serving children and adults with developmental disabilities. He was presented his Hands of Christ plaque by Bishop Matthew H. Clark in an Oct. 17 service at Perinton's St. John of Rochester Church. The annual award, begun in 1985, recognizes high-school seniors for outstanding service in their church, school and community.

This year nearly 600 seniors around the diocese are Hands of Christ recipients. Bishop Clark was also scheduled to preside at ceremonies Oct. 21 at Immaculate Conception



Bishop Matthew H. Clark hands Robert Machi his 2001 Hands of Christ award at St. John of Rochester Church in Fairport Oct. 17.

Church in Ithaca, and Oct. 28 at St. John the Evangelist Church in Greece.

Robert was so looking forward to attending his Hands of Christ service, that he got a brand-new suit to wear. He was also excited about reuniting with Bishop Clark, who had confirmed him.

Robert has been an altar server for more than two years. He was drawn to this duty after Father Kevin Murphy, pastor of St. Joseph's Parish, encouraged people with disabilities to become more involved in church ministry. Robert said he has made good friends with the St. Joseph's priests since he began altar serving.

"I like holding the book up so the priest can read it," Robert said. "I wear a cross around my neck and sometimes I light the candles." He added that both he and his mother plan to become eucharistic ministers at St. Joseph's.

Robert would also like to become involved with the

Thursday Mass offered at his school. "I might help Father Bob out," he said, referring to the weekly celebrant, Father Robert Kennedy, pastor of Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish.

In his other activities at School of the Holy Childhood, Robert noted that he's currently working on a birthday list to be published in the school newspaper. In addition, he helps make clocks, magazine racks, cabinets and shelves that support school fundraising. "We sell them at a (Marketplace and Eastview) mall sale," Robert explained.

Though Robert has moderate mental retardation, his mother said that he looks forward to graduating from School of the Holy Childhood when he turns 21 and embarking upon a career. At this point, Robert said, his leading choice of work is in a floral shop.

Robert is obviously happy in his school environment. While recently giving a tour of Holy Childhood to a visitor, he constantly smiled as he raced from room to room, greeting nearly every instructor and fellow student along the way.

"He's a friendly young man, I'll tell you. He likes to help the younger people," said Sister Marie Concepta Branca, SSJ, assistant supervisor of Holy Childhood children's program.

"I just see that he's always so helpful and upbeat," Sister Branca added. "Sometimes he has a problem or two, but you talk to him and get his spirits right back up again."

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