

a Young

City official values McQuaid ed

Story by Rob Cullivan

ROCHESTER — Rodric C. Cox-Cooper, 33, will admit that in seventh grade, he was a bit of a problem.

"I was not obeying the teachers," he recalled. "I was skipping classes, hanging with the so-called bad crowd."

Although his parents were Presbyterian, they decided that it was time to transfer him from a public school to McQuaid Jesuit High School.

"My parents decided I needed more structure and more discipline, and that I needed to be pushed harder ...," he said.

An African-American, Cox-Cooper remembered that he didn't particularly care for the idea of being a Protestant minority at a mostly white, all-boys Catholic high school and told his parents so.

"I had to wear a coat and tie. There are no girls at this school. I said, 'What are you doing to me?'"

What his parents were doing would profoundly shape his life, leading him to become an honor roll student, a high school football player and, today, director of the Bureau of Human Services for the City of Rochester. His office oversees the city's work-force training initiatives and its human services for youth and the homeless, and distributes funding to various community agencies that collaborate with the city.

Cox-Cooper credited his years at McQuaid with inspiring him to become a serious student who went on to obtain a college education and enter the world of government service. He was one of three McQuaid graduates honored in November by *The Rochester Business Journal* and KeyBank, which cosponsored the sixth annual "40 Under 40 Awards." The awards recognize 40 professionals under age 40 for service to both their employer and the community at large. One person who nominated Cox-Cooper was Loretta C. Scott, the city's commissioner of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Human Services.

"I just have a really good feeling that he's going to be a significant leader," she said.

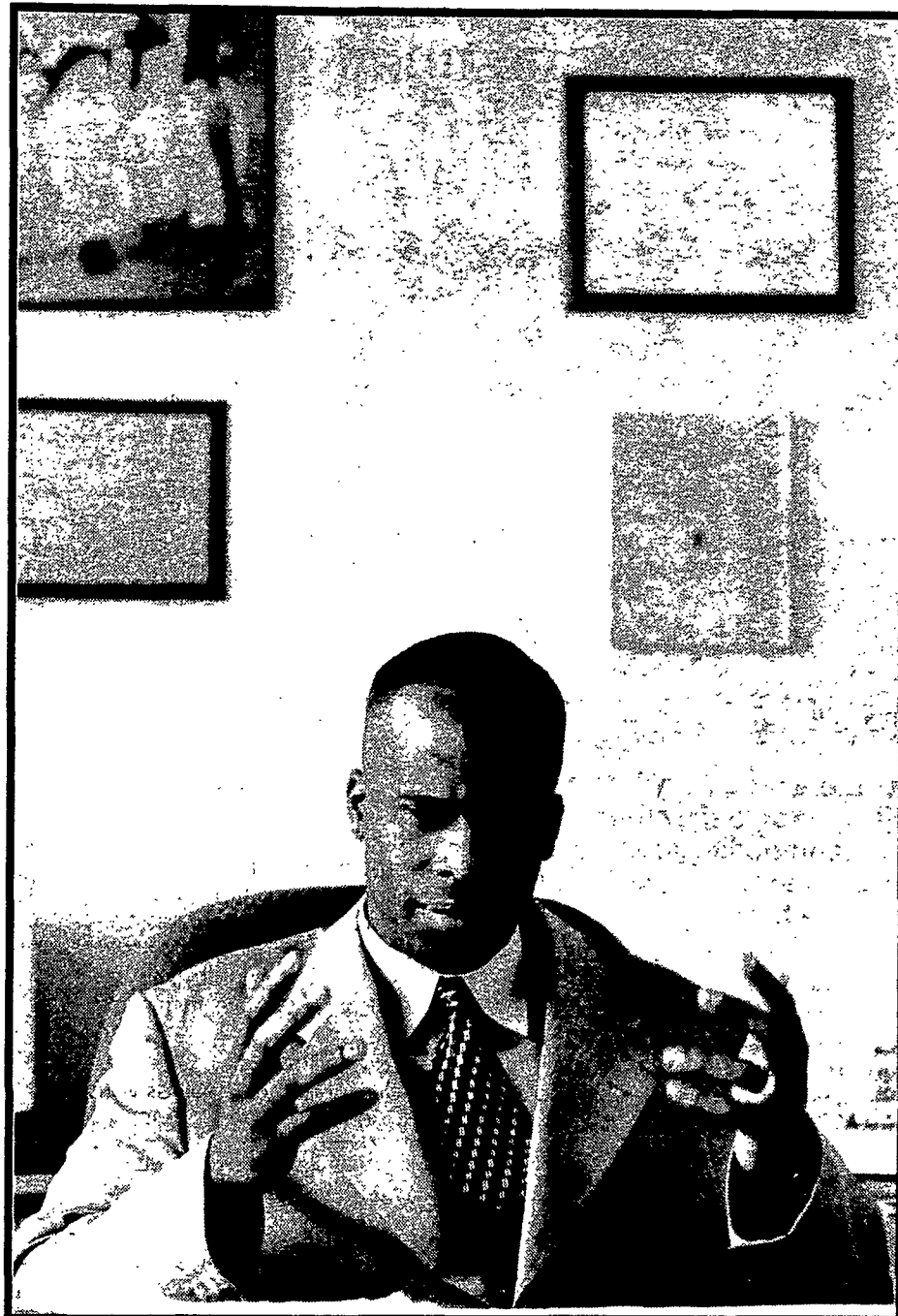
Along with Cox-Cooper, Brian C. Peartree, a 1985 graduate, and Stephen C. LaSalle II, a 1979 graduate, were also honored as "40 Under 40" winners at a luncheon at the Hyatt Regency. Peartree is senior commercial security consultant with Doyle Security Systems Inc., and is also volunteer chief of the Brighton Fire Department. A parishioner at Blessed Sacrament Church, Peartree is an alumni volunteer at McQuaid and also president of Alive at Five Ltd. and co-chairs the board of directors for its sister organization, Alive at the Memorial Art Gallery. Both groups put on fundraising social events.

"I've always believed in giving back to the community where I live," Peartree, 34, said of his civic involvement.

LaSalle is vice president, planning and finance, with Celltech Americas Inc., a biopharmaceuticals firm. He is also a board member, treasurer and coach with Fairport Youth Lacrosse; chair of Celltech Medeva United Way Campaign 2001 and coordinator of an employee service project. A resident of Fairport, LaSalle is also a member and past chairman of the finance committee at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Mendon. LaSalle, who turned 40 March 9, said getting the "40 Under 40" award was "super."

"You don't do these things for the recognition," LaSalle said. "But, in the end, it's nice to see that there's an appreciation for the effort you're making."

Like his fellow McQuaid alumni "40 Un-



Andreae Dixon/Staff photographer

der 40" winners, Cox-Cooper also serves or has served with a number of community organizations. Yet he was far less familiar with Catholicism than his fellow winners when he first went to McQuaid, and recalled being intrigued by Catholic practices and beliefs. Today, he's a member of Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church, but he's ecumenical in his outlook.

"The values that exist in the Presbyterian or Baptist tradition also exist in the Catholic Church," he said.

On a related note, although he is a Democrat working for a Democratic city hall, Cox-Cooper said he welcomed Republican President George W. Bush's proposal for the federal government to fund faith-based social service programs. He added that he still needed to see the details, but pointed out that he was enthusiastic about the concept.

"I've long been an advocate of religious organizations and congregations taking an active part in community building," he said. He noted that he himself is a member of a community development corporation that grew out of his church, and has worked with various congregations and church-based groups through his office. He dismissed the concerns that some opponents of Bush's initiative have raised concerning the inappropriate mixing of church and state.

"I think Washington, D.C., tends to get hung up on these partisan issues," he said, pointing out local governments have long worked with church-related agencies like Catholic Family Center in Rochester. He added that churches have provided valuable civic leaders like the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and naturally play a role in strengthening the social fabric.

As long as certain boundaries are set to control where government funding goes, churches and government can be partners on issues of common concern, he said.

"You're not funding the teaching of religion, which I would (oppose). You're funding the community's development."

Cooper-Cox and his wife, Jacquelyn, have a 3-month-old daughter, and the new father plans on rooting his family in the hometown he wants to serve.

"Being a native of Rochester, I have no greater passion than improving Rochester."

Events

For information on these events, call the hotline for Odyssey, the diocesan young adults network, at 716/328-3228; ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375. You can also visit the Odyssey Web site at <http://www.ggw.org/odyssey/events.htm>.

● **Wednesday, March 28:** The Catholic Coffeehouse in Haffey Hall at St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave., Rochester, 7:30-9:30 p.m. Sister Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, president of St. Bernard's Institute, Rochester, and Tom McDade-Clay, also of St. Bernard's, will speak on "A Catholic Understanding of Sexuality."

● **Friday, March 30:** "Fishy Friday" at the Winfield Grill, 647 N. Winton Road, Rochester, 5:30 p.m., followed by the movie "Dolphins" at the Strasenburgh Planetarium. RSVP by March 27.

● **Sunday, April 8:** Palm Sunday Mass at St. Bridget's Church, 14 Mark St., Rochester, 10:30 a.m. featuring presentation of "The Last Seven Words of Christ."

● **Thursday, April 12:** Holy Thursday Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park, Rochester, 7 p.m.

● **Thursday, April 19:** Dinner at Woody's II, 2758 W. Henrietta Road, Henrietta, 7 p.m. RSVP by April 18.

● **Sunday, April 22:** Mass at St. Salomé's, 4282 Culver Road, Irondequoit. Call for time.

● **Saturday, April 28:** Hike at Blackcreek State Park. Call for time and meeting place.

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