on the MOVE

STORY BY MIKE LATONA
PHOTOS BY DAVID WALLACE

Becky Kessler, 16, (left) of St. Rita's Church in Webster, and Ashley Cole, 16, of Penfield Presbyterian Church, members o the co-ed Boy Scout Troop 303, help prepare for a food drive at Webster Community Center March 31.

Scout sails through challenges of service

Becky works with Brad Collins, 11, a member of St. Rita's and Boy Scout Troop 163.

Becky, who won the Boy Scouts' Pope Pius XII award, packs boxes.

Becky Kessler has been steadily involved in Girl Scouts since kindergarten, earning so many awards that she has a vest covered with patches and medals.

Her most recent honor could be considered the most unusual – mainly because the Pope Pius XII emblem is a Boy Scout award. Becky, 16, was one of two people – the other was James Quattrini of Corning-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community – to receive this emblem at the annual diocesan Scout Recognition Service on Feb. 25. She is only the third girl from the Rochester Diocese in the past 25 years, and the first since 1988, to be so honored. Bishop Matthew H. Clark presented her with the award at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Youths in grade nine through college are eligible for the Pope Pius XII honor. According to the diocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting, it involves "church related ministries and vocations – avenues through which baptized persons commit themselves to serve humanity in obedience to God's call within our Catholic faith community."

Becky is a two-year member of the Ship 303 Venture Post in the Boy Scouts of America's Otetiana Council. The post works with Lotus, a schooner based on Lake Ontario at Sodus Point, Wayne County. The restored two-masted sailing ship is open to the general public for tours, and also takes part in boat festivals around New York state.

Becky and her Ship 303 Post cohorts are part of the Lotus crew. The craft is owned by the Otetiana Council. Becky, who has risen to the level of apprentice, said that her duty, though demanding, has helped her develop pride and respect for the schooner.

"That's why they have you spend so much time cleaning," she said. "You get to make it better looking, repainting ... you feel a part of it."

Becky said the crew is quick to inform guests that they should show the same respect. "When you get on the boat, you don't jump around on it," she said.

Though Lotus only operates from May through September, Becky noted that Post 303 holds meetings throughout the year and conducts fundraisers for such charitable organizations as Kiwanis and the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

While her involvement in Post 303 was integral to earning the Pope Pius XII emblem, Becky explained that her Catholic faith played a big role as well. To prepare for the emblem, she was required to intensely examine why she is a Catholic and why she enjoys taking part in Catholic-sponsored activities.

Pope Pius XII is the only Boy Scout honor for which a girl can qualify. She must be involved in the Boy Scouts' Explorer or Venture program. Explorers pursue such trades as emergency medical service, auto mechanics and broadcasting; Venture units are more hobby-oriented. Venture units can also originate through parish youth groups.

Ed Winterkorn, co-chair of the Catholic Committee on Scouting, noted that Explorers opened to girls in the 1960s. The Venture program, an offshoot of Explorers, has maintained the emphasis on coed participation.

"If you're doing the job you need to do for high school youth, you can't be exclusive," Winterkorn commented. "They're developed to where at that stage of the game they're no longer interested in camping, but interested in careers."

Becky's Pope Pius XII honor came one year after she received a major award as a Girl Scout, the Spirit Alive Award. This honor rewards high school-age girls for greater participation in church ministry.

Becky has a long history of Catholic involvement. She attended St. Rita's School and Siena Catholic Academy. She's an altar server and youth-group member at St. Rita's Parish. At Bishop Kearney High School, where she's completing her junior year, Becky is a varsity cheerleader in the fall and winter, and competes in track and field in the spring.

She remains quite involved in Girl Scouts, serving on the diocesan Catholic Scouting Retreat junior staff. She also stays involved with Troop 515 at St. Rita's. Becky's mother, Helena, serves as that troop's leader and also belongs to the Catholic Committee on Scouting.

Becky's desire to stay involved in Scouting, she said, stems from the close friendships she has made along the way.

"The main thing about Scouting is meeting all the people," she remarked.

COMING NEXT WEEK: Multi-church Lenten program