

MOVIE

on the

Story by Mike Latona

Photo by

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Mike Tuffo stretches with his soccer students at the YMCA in Greece June 9.

Greece teen charts his own course

EDITORS' NOTE: In recognition of graduation season, this is the first of a four-part series profiling Hands of Christ award recipients. Bishop Matthew H. Clark presents the award each fall to hundreds of high-school seniors throughout the diocese who actively volunteer in their church, school and/or community.

Mike Tuffo says he's not the type to shoot off his mouth in crowds — in fact, he claims to be on the shy side. But ask his opinion on certain issues — such as Sunday Mass attendance, or substance abuse — and you'll discover a 17-year-old who's unflinching with his views.

Though he's involved in numerous activities, Mike said he prioritizes regular attendance at Sunday Mass. He reasoned that if people can arise early on weekdays for work or school, there's no excuse for missing a one-hour Mass.

"People say they're too busy. I always believe if you really want to do something, you find time to do it," said Mike, a parishioner at Our Lady of Mercy in Greece.

"I always feel better when I go," he added. "You've got to make the best of it. If you go there with a long face and an attitude, well, yeah, you're going to be bored."

Whereas religion is not always a popular topic in his age group, Mike said, his Catholicism is "definitely something I'm not embarrassed about. In fact, I'm proud of it."

Mike is also unafraid to take a stand in situations involving substance abuse, saying he doesn't care for the idea of inflicting physical harm by drinking or smoking. For example, he said, some teens might get so impaired at a rock concert that they don't even remember the music — and then they'll brag about it. "I don't understand it," he remarked.

Earlier this year, Mike said, he



HANDS OF CHRIST

*We Are The Hands of Christ,
Where We Work He Works.
We Are The Feet of Christ,
Where We Go He Goes.
We Are The Heart of Christ,
Where We Love He Loves.
Where We Are, Christ Is.*

— Teresa of Avila

attended a party in Myrtle Beach where alcohol was prevalent. Though he was offered drinks more than once, he said, it was easy for him to decline.

"I had Sprite," he said.

Regarding peer pressure in general, Mike commented, "You shouldn't have to change for anyone. I don't like following people who want you to be their personal slave."

No, Mike definitely sets his own agenda — and it's a busy one:

Mike has been a track-and-field star for Greece Athena High School. He placed fourth in the discus event at the Monroe County Championships on May 19, and sixth in the shot put at the Section 5 championships on May 26. He's currently a member of the Greece Eclipse, a summer travel soccer team — although this activity is temporarily on hold due to a recent

re-aggravation of a knee injury.

Last fall he served as captain of Greece Athena's varsity soccer team, and in the winter he competed in indoor track. In addition to sports, he has been a member of the school's chemistry, biology and Italian clubs — and the math team as well.

He works part-time as a youth counselor at the Northwest YMCA, and served as a groundskeeper last summer at Our Lady of Mercy Church. He has volunteered during the past year at Park Ridge Mental Health Center, helping sort mail and occasionally transporting patients in wheel chairs. Among all these commitments, Mike spent considerable time helping around the house last summer as his sister was recovering from an illness.

Whew!

"I like to keep active. I can't sit home and do nothing," Mike said.

In order to balance his schedule, he said, he puts time limits on each area of interest. "All the things I do, I don't make them my whole life. I do a little bit of everything," he explained.

Mike, who said his grade-point average is between 3.7 and 3.8, will attend SUNY College at Cortland this fall following his graduation from Greece Athena. He hopes to pursue a career in medicine, possibly as an orthopedic surgeon. His interest in this field, he said, was sparked when he was going through major reconstructive surgery on his knee. The condition stems from a soccer injury suffered during his junior year.

Add up Mike's accomplishments, and it becomes clear why he was nominated by his parish as a Hands of Christ award recipient last fall. Mike received his plaque from Bishop Matthew H. Clark in October.

"I was definitely honored. It's nice to know you get recognition for being the person you are," he said.