

On the MOVE

STORY BY JEANNE KIDERA

PHOTO BY
KARIN VON VOIGTLANDER



Special Sitter Randy Kohlmeier reads to 5-year-old Adam McDowell (right) and his 4-year-old sister, Amanda, at their Webster home June 20.

Special sitter for special kids

This is the last of a four-part series on diocesan Hands of Christ award recipients. These awards are given each year to high-school seniors for outstanding service in church, school and/or community.

Randy Kohlmeier, 18, stood next to a yellow slide, looking up at Adam McDowell perched at the top.

"Ready, set, go," the pair exclaimed in unison.

Randy was baby-sitting for Adam and his 4-year-old sister, Amanda, in their Webster home. Randy had been referred to Robert and Maryellen McDowell and their two children by The Arc of Monroe County's Special Sitters Program, which provides sitters for families of people with developmental disabilities. Five-year-old Adam has Down's syndrome.

Randy, a parishioner at St. Rita's in Webster, heard about the program through a school announcement when he was in ninth grade, and since has been referred to several families.

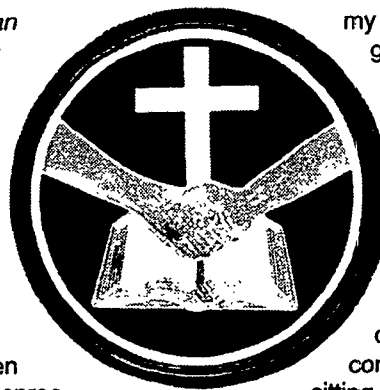
"I didn't have any experience with the developmentally disabled, but I did baby-sit around the neighborhood. It sounded interesting, so I followed up on it," he said.

The Special Sitters Program is "a home based respite program," according to Arc's Web site, and training is "designed to promote skills, confidence and sensitivity in providing care for people with special needs."

Randy had to complete 20 hours of training over two weeks in order to meet the program's requirements. "We had a lot of paperwork to read, and videos. I also learned CPR," he said. "You learn how to take care of the special needs."

Those needs really vary depending upon on the child, Randy explained. The first family he sat for as a Special Sitter was that of a 7-year-old girl with autism.

"She was working with a program called Greenspan, which is really about getting the autistic person to be interactive," he said. "If she had a coloring book in her hand or wanted to color, I would take the crayons in my hand and try to get her to open



my fist and take the crayons. It was about trying to get her involved in interactions and to break out of her shell."

Randy said he was touched the first time she gave him a hug, because "it's hard for autistic people to break out of their shells. To even make eye contact is difficult for them."

Randy explained the duties of a Special Sitter while keeping an eye on Adam and Amanda, as they enjoyed a Winnie the Pooh videotape. Baby-sitting for a child who is developmentally disabled, for the most part, consists of activities common to any other baby-sitting job, he noted. "We watch movies, read books, play with toys. Whatever they want to do."

Hugs are one of Randy's favorite parts of being a Special Sitter. "When they give me a hug it feels like they really understand me and connect with me," he said with a smile.

He didn't have to wait long for such a moment after he looked at Adam and remarked, "Wow! Somebody lost a tooth!" Adam shone a bright grin at Randy in reply, showing a new gap where the tooth had once been.

"Making them laugh — that's the most fun part. I just like working with people and helping people. I like seeing them smile," Randy said, adding with a hint of modesty, "I know it might sound mushy."

Randy's passion for service started in seventh grade — doing dishes. St. Rita's parishioner Jane Kunzog had made an announcement at Mass asking youths to help with the parish's Breakfast Club, a group of senior citizens that meets regularly for breakfast. Randy began helping out as a dishwasher and busboy, and continued serving with the club throughout high school because he enjoyed spending time with the participants.

This volunteer role whetted his appetite for community service. "Breakfast Club started everything. It's what got me into everything else," he said. Since then, his list of activities has grown to include not only Special Sitters, but also being certified as an emergency medical technician — and becoming the eighth Kohlmeier to join the West Webster Fire Department.

He considers volunteering and community service an important part of his faith, one that has taught him to get out in the community and help people. "Rather than just saying you're Catholic, actually going out and practicing it is rewarding," he remarked.

In addition to his service activities, Randy played on Webster High School's varsity tennis and bowling teams, and received the 2001 Scholar-Athlete Award from the Webster Athletic Boosters Organization.

"I like being somewhere, doing something, rather than just sitting at home watching TV or being on the Internet," he said.

Randy, who graduated with honors June 24, will attend St. John Fisher College in the fall on Presidential and Science Scholars scholarships. He also received a Volunteerism Scholarship from the state Firemen's Association, as well as two bowling scholarships.

Randy said his service activities — which he plans to continue during Christmas break and other vacations — have inspired him toward a career devoted to helping people. "I'm going to start with bio(logy) and see where the classes lead me. I've always wanted to be a doctor, so I'll probably, hopefully, end up pre-med," Randy said.

ANSWER SURVEY - WIN TICKETS

Interested in spending the day at Six Flags Darien Lake — at the *Catholic Courier's* expense? Qualify to win one-day passes to the park by completing the following questionnaire and returning it to us no later than July 26.

1. How often do you read the On the Move page? _____
2. What do you like best about it? _____
3. What would you like to see improved or changed? _____
4. What story ideas or topics would you suggest? _____

Include your name, address, age and phone, and mail to the *Catholic Courier*, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y., 14624-0379.

Rally: s
Marian
Shrine c
Auriesv
Mass, Fr
celebrat

Registr
21 "Seel
adults 1
Italy Val
Sat.; \$50
Diocese
Mancuse
Rochest
716/328

deadline
Jubilee M
married
years; Bi
celebran
response
address 1
Buffalo 1
14624, c
295 or 7
or e-mail

deadline
Family D
Lake; pa
park-pic
lunch 1-3
or Jeanni
3210, ext

Registrat
14 progr
Responsi
Good, W
Catholic
Church S
p.m.; free
9784, ext

rosary: W
Dansville;

Registrati
golf tourn
Knights o
the Apost
Salmon C
355 Wash
Spencerp
times; soci
Jude's Fait
4100 Lyell
\$60; \$15 d
Nash 716/
■ WEI
Shamrock
St. Patrick
Committee