

—Christmas Appeal—

Father, son face life as one

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Seven-year-old Tre Milton, son of Auburn resident Riley Milton Sr., admitted that going to dinner in a restaurant with his father made him nervous.

"I was scared because there was too much people," said Tre, who hid inside his father's coat before they sat down to eat.

However, Tre wound up enjoying himself thoroughly, eating a hamburger and drinking a soda while his father feasted on a chicken dinner. It was Milton's reward for completing a "Nurturing Parenting" program at Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes. Milton was referred to the program last June by the Cayuga County Department of Social Services, and worked with Nancy Annibale, an agency caseworker. Milton completed the program in November, Annibale said.

The reward dinner was paid for with funds from the Christmas Appeal, which is also funding the purchase of a crock pot for Milton, and occasionally some school snacks for Tre, who is in second grade. Tre said he is looking forward to his father owning a crock pot so that his favorite foods can be made: "fried rice, chicken, beans and hot dogs."

Milton, a single father, lives on Social Security due to a disability caused by lupus, a chronic inflammatory disease in which the body's immune system attacks its tissue and organs. The disease often makes him tired, he said, and he has to avoid



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Christmas Appeal funds provided a restaurant meal for Riley Milton Sr., and his son, Tre, 7, when Milton completed the Catholic Charities "Nurturing Parenting" program.

the sun.

The Catholic Charities parenting program consisted of sessions once or twice a month, Annibale said, and is devoted to getting parents in touch with their own feelings and notions concerning parenthood. Sessions touch on such issues as how to discipline children, handle stress, recognize and understand children's feelings, and help children develop. Milton was an excellent client, she said, and Tre's manner is proof of his father's devotion to becoming a bet-

ter parent.

"Tre's a nice, polite, well-mannered, bright boy," she said.

Milton said he's traveled a long road to becoming a good parent. Milton had helped Tre's mother regain from foster care the custody of two children she had had before she and Milton met. Then, two years after Tre was born, his mother left the family, and state authorities placed all three children in foster care.

Milton said he was compelled to change the way he lived his life in order to get his son back.

"I was devastated," he said, remembering what it was like to lose Tre. "I thought, basically, my life was over. I'm smiling now, but it was a nightmare."

Determined to get his son back, he participated in a social-services parenting skills program for more than a year and underwent rehabilitation for drug and alcohol abuse.

"I started going regularly to church, and praying regularly," he said.

Tre was returned to his father's custody in the fall of 1997. The bond of affection between the two is obvious, Annibale said, noting that Tre routinely tells his father: "I love you daddy. You're my best dad."

Milton expressed gratitude to God for helping him be a good father, and dealing with other challenges. He added that he'll never get over the fact that he has come so far.

"I know now that God had this plan for me. It's a miracle. I tell people every day. It doesn't get old."

Prior recipients

Caseworkers from Catholic Charities agencies submitted examples, including the following, of how Christmas Appeal funds are used year-round:

★ A single mother who has a son with asthma was injured, out of work and awaiting workers' compensation. She thought she could put off buying fuel for the furnace, but an early cold snap caused her son's asthma to worsen. Since the woman had no money to purchase fuel, she received \$129.90 in Christmas Appeal funds to buy fuel oil.

★ A 22-year-old single mother and her 3-month-old daughter became homeless after the child's verbally abusive father threw them

out. They stayed with a friend for a few nights, but the friend feared being evicted for having too many people in the dwelling. With nowhere to go and no family in the area, mother and child lived in a car until the mother's money ran out. She had no money for gasoline, diapers or food. Fifty-five dollars in Christmas Appeal funds were used for the mother and child to stay in a motel room for a night until the mother could apply for public assistance. Diapers and gasoline were also purchased.

★ A 70-year-old grandmother on a fixed income and living in a subsidized housing complex took her five grandchildren from foster care and began raising them herself. The 4-year-old grandchild needed

clothing, and the grandmother received \$50 in Christmas Appeal funds to purchase clothing at a discount store.

★ A single mother's baby was born three months premature. Many weeks on a respirator left the baby's lungs scarred, and breathing was a struggle for him. Even at 8 months old, he was required to be on a breathing monitor 24 hours a day to alert his mother when he stopped breathing so she could stimulate him to breathe again. The mother's phone service was turned off due to an unpaid bill, and if the baby had a breathing emergency, she had no way to call anyone for help. Eighty-five dollars in Christmas Appeal funds were used to pay the bill and turn the service back on.

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