By GAIL DeGEORGE

By GALL DeGEORGE

Four-year-old Thomas Keller of
Troy didn't want to visit Maynard
empty handed. So when he and his
christmas tree at Somersel Mail
Last week, Thomas brought a present: two drawings of Christmas
trees he had made to hang on Maynard's limbs.
"That's my first Christmas present this year," said Maynard, who
thanked the youngster.
Thomas' present is just one of the
many reactions that children have
to the talking Christmas tree, said
Linn Smith, one of Maynard's voic-

Linn Smith, one of Maynard's voices.

"The kids are fun," he said. "Some are amused by it, others awed by it. The older ones know something's going on, but can't quite figure it out."

L'inn was filling in for his brother, kim, who was hired as this year's voice. Although he had only been a voice for a few days, he seemed to have the role of Maynard down fairly well.

Walynard and Mrs. Claus, played this year by Jeanne deCaj Wassell, a Birmingham resident, work as a team. Mrs. Claus attracts the chirden, gives them coloring books, and tells them about Maynard. "The littlest overwhelmed by it," Ms. Wassell said.

She helps the children get over their initial shyness by having them

Getting

talk to the tree and shake Maynard's limb. The limb shaking is really tickling Maynard, she tells them, and the tree responds with an appro-priate laugh.

priate laugh.

MANNARD EVEN has his own coloring book and story, which tells how he is able to talk. As a reward for sheltering animals and giving his pine cones to children, Santa crowned him and gave him the ability to speak. So every year, Santa brings Maynard with him to visit with the children on his annual trek from the North Pole.

The reaction from nost parents and other adults is positive, said Ms. Wassell, adding that many see Maynard as a different direction of Christmas, without the religious overtones of St. Nick, or Santa Claus.

It's beat when adults play along and don't try to discover Maynard's secret, she said

Smith has noted that adults' reactions range from having fun with the childreng from having fun with the childreng from the properties of the childreng from the properties of the childreng from the properties of the childreng from the childreng from

actions, some and the control of the



Kids are fascinated by the tree that talks to them at Somerset Mall.

ANDY ALSO wanted to know about the lights in Maynard's eyes, and the tree obligingly blinked his lights at him. The Pleasant Ridge youngster told Maynard he had been to see him last year as well, and

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noted that the tree's beard had

He also had a bit of advice for Maynard. "Next year, you should hide that camera a little more."

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Pickup truck dunked

Gary Wiltshire of Pontiac Township said his 1973 GMC pickup suffered mi-nor damage Monday when it rolled down an enbankment and sank in a pond on Oakland University's Roches-

pond on Oakland University's Roches-ter area campus. Wiltshire, who had the truck towed back to his home after the incident, said the engine turned over when he tried to start it, but a headlight must be replaced. Wiltshire parked his truck in a lot on the south side of the pond, called Beer Lake, about 7:40 a.m. Monday.

He said he engaged the truck's emergency brake since the parking lot angled toward the pond.

About 30 minutes later he returned to see Pontiac Township Fire Department pulling his truck, by way of a tow truck and chain, from the pond.

"He was pretty bummed out about it, for sure," said Investigator Med Gitroy of the university's Department of Public Saftey. lic Saftey.

Gilroy said the parking brake apparently released.



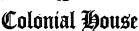
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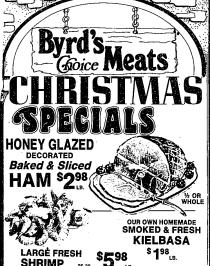
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