

Sorrow from page A1

ley Cup championship Monday, Greg and his twin brother, Keith, took a whack at some driveway hockey. Greg guarded the net from his wheelchair while Keith tried to shoot the ball into the goal.

"You can be the referee, Dad," said Greg, who correctly predicted the Wings would win the title on the following night.

A little while later, during an interview in the family dining room, a bulletin board behind Ed Kornacki was covered with ribbons awarded to Greg for various competitions at the Farmington Gymnastics Center. Greg also likes ice-ball.

"He's very social," said Nancy Kornacki. "There are no behavioral issues."

Other kinds of issues do exist, however.

Longtime members of the Sorrows parish, the Kornackis are so upset about what they view as a form of discrimination that they pulled their 9-year-old son, Brian, and Keith, out of St. Ignace and enrolled them into different schools for next year. The family also has a 2-year-old daughter, Maria, who also has spina bifida, although not as seriously as her brother does.

Greg, meanwhile, will attend Eagle Elementary School in

Farmington Public Schools for a half-day of traditional kindergarten and a half-day session including physical and occupational therapy.

It is not what they want. Although they have good things to say about the public school district, they simply prefer for their children to be raised with a Catholic education.

Mixed signals

The current roadblock for Greg didn't seem to be there in 1996-97, when, the parents said, they had a positive meeting with Sorrows Principal Roberta Clemak. "We discussed the disability and expressed interest in enrolling him there," Nancy said. "There was every indication from that meeting that all of our children were welcome at Our Lady of Sorrows."

And, during February and March, 11 people took part in a comprehensive evaluation of Greg, called an Individualized Education Assessment, done by Farmington Public Schools. All of them — including Nancy Taylor of the school district and Ward's Sue Ford — said there were no apparent behavioral problems, that Greg adapted well to his surroundings and that he was ready for kinder-

garten. Neither Taylor nor Ford could not be reached for comment last week.

The Kornackis then scheduled an early April meeting with Clemak.

"We came to that meeting already assuming that our child was welcome based on our meeting from 1 1/2-years ago," Nancy Kornacki said.

Their assumption was off the mark. The family found out that day that Greg would not be accepted into the school. Subsequently, they were told the same thing by Hurley and received a letter reiterating Sorrows' position.

"As a parish school providing basic educational services for students in kindergarten through eighth grade," stated Clemak in the letter, dated May 6. Sorrows "does not have the capability to administer Special Education Services for those children who have serious physical or learning disabilities."

"We also believe that accepting Greg into kindergarten at this time would be a disservice to him and to you. Be assured that as he becomes more independent, we will be very happy to review his progress and determine whether his well-being would be maintained and

enhanced at Our Lady of Sorrows School."

Why not?

No specifics were given, other than the fact a construction program is beginning at Sorrows and Clemak couldn't guarantee whether the environment would be safe and sufficient enough for a student requiring special needs.

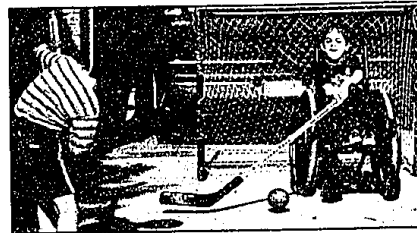
Hurley, on Friday, said Sorrows isn't yet able to meet the needs of all students. But a consultant recently was hired to assist those with special needs, and a renovation project is now under way that will improve the facilities.

"Not only do we know what our strengths are," Hurley said, "but we know what our limitations are."

The Kornackis even offered to pay for the installation of a ramp and for one of the exit doors. They also offered to have one of the parents to go to Sorrows on certain days of the week to carry Greg's wheelchair to a basement classroom for music.

"We said, 'Let us know what day and what time and we'll be there,'" said Nancy. "There was no response."

Another reason for the Kornackis' rancor was the fact while Greg was not being permitted to enroll, his twin brother Keith (who does not have the birth defect) was — and almost automatically.



Setting goals: Greg defends the net while playing some driveway hockey with his twin, Keith.

"We didn't need to provide any information about Keith, except for his birth certificate," Nancy Kornacki said. "So, he was admitted. People see someone in a wheelchair and they make some assumptions."

Make it specific

The condition, the family contends, is something they and Greg will successfully overcome. After all, Greg already has had to jump hurdles since he and Keith were born in April, 1992. Ed and Nancy knew during the first trimester of her pregnancy that the casing around the spinal cord wasn't properly closing for one of the twin fetuses.

Immediately after Greg was born, surgery was performed to enclose the spine. In the years since, he has had about 20 surgeries. Those have included procedures to correct a club foot, repair a hernia (unrelated to the spina bifida) and insert a shunt to take fluid away from the brain and drain it down to the abdominal area.

Physical and occupational therapy continue to this day.

"With all the things he's faced

in his life," Nancy Kornacki said, "and where he's at now, we're extremely proud of him. We feel he has as much potential as anybody else who attends school over there."

Because of their treatment at Sorrows, which hurt the Kornackis, they severed ties with the parish.

"Our children deserve to be in an educational environment where they are truly wanted and welcome to be," Nancy said. "There are other excellent choices out there."

They maintain there is nothing in Sorrows' admissions policy addressing situations such as their son's. If something good can come out of the fiasco, which the Kornackis want, it would be for Sorrows to more clearly define that policy.

"What we'd like to have happen," she said, "is I'd like the school, the church, whatever, ... I'd like their admissions policy to be very carefully reviewed and revised to accurately reflect the position they want to take as a Catholic school."

It has some vague statements in there. We just don't want this to happen to another family."

Reward from page A1

cultural/Multiracial Community Council is contributing \$200 for a total of \$4,000 in the two cases.

Don Cohen, Anti-Defamation League regional director, praised the actions.

"A hate crime is targeted towards a specific segment of the community, but it covers an entire community," said Cohen during a Farmington Hills City Council meeting June 15. "It tries to make targeted groups feel isolated and terrorized."

"Your action today makes it

very clear that it's not the targeted group that should feel isolated, but it's those who bring a message of hate and bigotry into Farmington Hills."

Farmington Hills police are investigating both incidents. At Adat Shalom Synagogue, vandals spray-painted anti-Israel slogans, suggesting those involved may have an anarchist or political agenda.

Graffiti found at Forest Elementary was ethnic in nature and more crudely written, police

said. Juveniles may have been involved in that incident.

"The experience of our police department is, especially if it's juveniles, and you offer a reward, you do have a chance of getting some information," City Manager Daniel Hobbs said.

"It's more important for us to make a statement that this type of behavior is not tolerated in our community."

Anyone with information should call Farmington Hills police at 248-473-9595.

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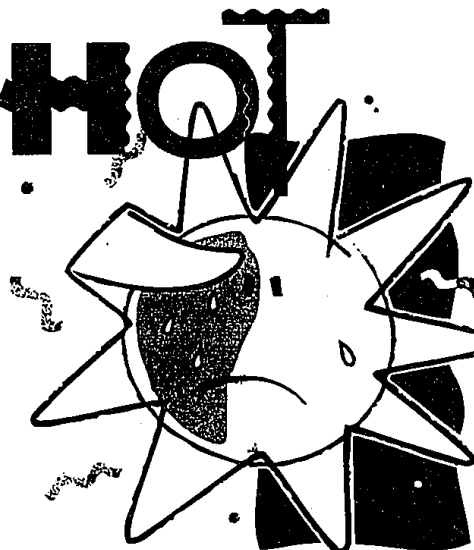


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