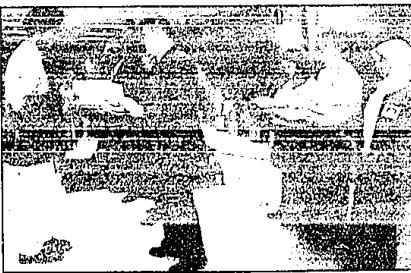




STAFF PHOTO BY ELIZABETH CARNegie

Presentation: The Mercyaires sing the Beatles classic, *Blackbird*. At top right, Rajbir Bedi (L) accepts his award from State Rep. Andrew Raczkowski. Standing behind them are other winners Alena Acker (L), Sue Anker and Baharash Aslani.



STAFF PHOTO BY ELIZABETH CARNegie

Speech: Keynote speaker was former City Manager William Costick.

Friends honored for diversity efforts

By JON HUBBRED
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Whether you are in the 6th grade or a life-long student, diversity is simply a matter of making friends.

Just ask Sarah Burstein and Sister Mary Rose Charron, two of this year's 29 award winners honored by the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multi-Cultural/Multi-Racial Council.

"I visit with people in the nursing home," Burstein said when asked why she was honored. "It doesn't matter who they are, or where they came from."

Though she is the youngest over Rainbow recipient, at age 11, Burstein didn't look at all out of place in the crowd of honorees at the Council's Fifth Annual Rainbow Recognition Awards Breakfast, held Tuesday at the William Costick Activities Center in Farmington Hills.

She might have been a little shorter, but her smile was just as big as all the others. And Burstein isn't just a smiler. She's a carrier.

"My uncle was in a nursing home, and when I was visiting him, I waved to someone in the hall and it made them smile," Burstein explained. "I thought if I could make my uncle and one person in the hall smile, why not others?"

That spirit proved contagious with her friends as well. First, one came along and that person brought a few friends. Now, a group of seven or eight kids go from room to room, wherever they've been invited, to share a little warmth and a lot of laughter.

"I think of it as a way of getting more friends," Burstein said.

Sister Rose Mary Charron's friends gathered around her at Tuesday's award ceremony, two

tables full of people she invited to share her moment of joy. Honored for her work with the National Conference for Community and Justice, she seemed a little taken aback by the accolades.

"It was all God's doing," she said of her involvement with the NCCJ, a human relations organization dedicated to fighting bias, bigotry and racism. "I had been asked to head a conference for this part of the United States and Canada, and I said 'no' at first. But I did investigate."

That led her to Oscar Tce, who was affiliated with the NCCJ when it was known as the National Conference of Christians and Jews Interfaith Roundtable Clergy Trialog. After she confessed to not knowing a lot about other religions, he escorted Sister Charron to a Round Table meeting, the first of many she would attend.

"I wasn't smart enough to stop," she laughed. "I get so much life from all the people that are concerned. It's always something new that I'm learning, and I'm able to share. It just broadens my horizons."

Special friendships

Now affiliated with Sisters of Mercy-Mercy High School, Sister Charron has traveled to Australia and Europe, learning as she's gone along. While she freely admits it took her 13 years to earn a Bachelor's Degree ("I could never make up my mind about a major"), she now holds a Master's degree and a Ph.D.

Throughout her travels, she has made friends of all races, colors and creeds. Each relationship, she said, has brought something special to her life, as did Tuesday's award.

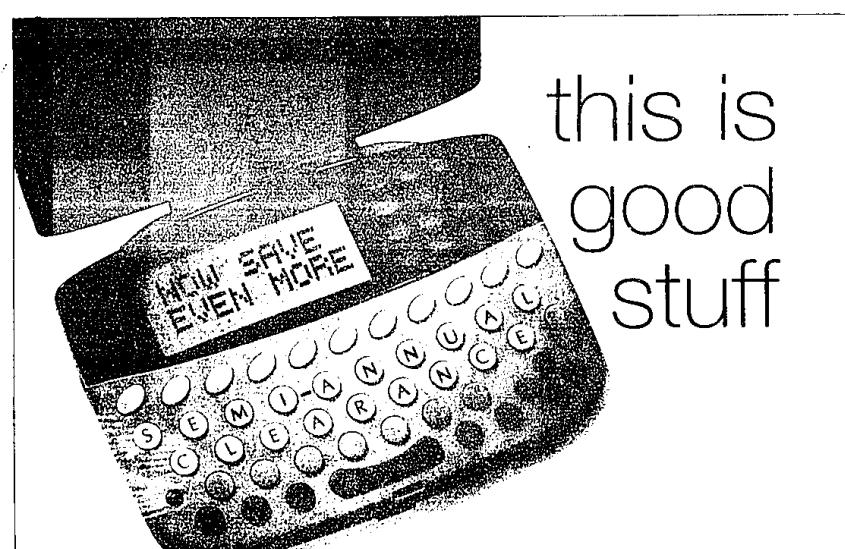
"I've met so many marvelous people and they've been so good to me. This kind of opportunity has contributed so much to the experience that has been my

Still work to do

In his remarks to the 320 guests who attended the breakfast — the largest crowd ever — former Farmington Hills City Manager Bill Costick urged continued efforts to encourage diversity. While the world has made wonderful advances in technology, science and other areas, issues of race still plague our society.

While many communities have established multi-cultural/multi-

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Honored: Aldo Vagozzi leaves the stage after receiving an award to the applause of Jim Hall and Karen Bolen.

