



June 29, 2014

Scouts Eagle project provides new setting for St. Columba altar

Person of the Week

Frank Sojak fsojak@tribdem.com

JOHNSTOWN — Thanks to a Boy Scout, the altar from the former St. Columba Church in Cambria City once again glorifies the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Mitchell Vena, a member of Resurrection Roman Catholic Parish – which was founded through the merger of five Cambria City parishes including St. Columba – was looking for an Eagle Scout project. He was contemplating building an altar at Resurrection’s picnic grove in Tanneryville, where outdoor Masses are held during church gatherings.

When Mitchell and his father met with Resurrection’s pastor, the Rev. Alan Thomas, to discuss the matter, Thomas said the church already has an altar. The pastor was referring to a granite altar from St. Columba that had been dismantled and was in storage at the picnic grove, Mitchell said.

Mitchell, a member of Troop 183, sponsored by St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in downtown Johnstown, said he, his father, Dr. Vincent Vena, and other volunteers started planning for the project in early spring.

Equipment was available to remove the boulder that had been serving as the altar and move St. Columba’s altar to its new location because Mitchell resides on a farm on Benshoff Hill with his father and mother, Johanna, a veterinarian.

“After the boulder was torn out, there was a big hole left in the ground,” Mitchell said. “We had to excavate around it so that we could pour a concrete base for the altar.”

Then they had to move the heavy altar and reassemble it on the concrete base. The next step was installing paving stones to match the footprint of the altar.

“It’s a beautiful picnic grove, which is used by a great parish,” Mitchell said. “I just wanted to do something nice for Resurrection, so we put in a proper Mass facility (altar) for the whole parish to enjoy.

“We wanted to do it in a way that brought the altar from St. Columba back to its former glory.”

The project was completed by late May, just in time for the first outdoor Mass of the year.

Mitchell said he could not have done the project without his father; the pastor; Chuck Rager, a member of Resurrection; his uncle, Marty Plunkett; members of his troop, including his brother, Ronny; and Rich Rhodes of Pennsylvania Vault Co., who donated the concrete.

For his effort on the project, Mitchell, who will be a junior at Bishop McCort Catholic High School in the fall, is the Person of the Week.

“What impresses me about Mitchell is his maturity, friendliness and undaunted optimism,” Thomas said. “His work of service for our parish is only one item in a history of service for our church as well as for St. John Gualbert Cathedral, where he assists in the production of the televised Mass.”

Mitchell and his family have been involved in mission work locally and abroad, Thomas said.

“I count Mitchell and his family as great blessings not only to Resurrection Parish but to me, personally,” Thomas said. “I am looking forward to the day when Mitchell receives his Eagle Scout badge, knowing that he has comported himself as one all along.”

Frank Sojak is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/FrankNews10. To nominate someone for Person of the Week, call 532-5058, 24 hours a day.