

Aerial porter fights for grants to needy children

Article and photos
by Capt. James Bishop

"If you know of any child in need, contact me."

That's the message TSgt. Ronald Orzechowski, NCOIC, special handling at the 58th Aerial Port Squadron, left with more people than he can remember.

Orzechowski was honored in a ceremony March 20 for writing grants totaling some \$50,000 to various needy children in the area through his position in the local chapter of the Knights of Columbus.

What is the motivating factor for his charitable acts? Not money. All his time is donated. Orzechowski says his grandfather was left deaf and mute as a four-year-old after being kicked by a horse.

"I remember the difficulties of trying to talk to him," he said. "That's where I first learned about having special needs. So I figured that if I've got free time why not use it in a way that helps others."

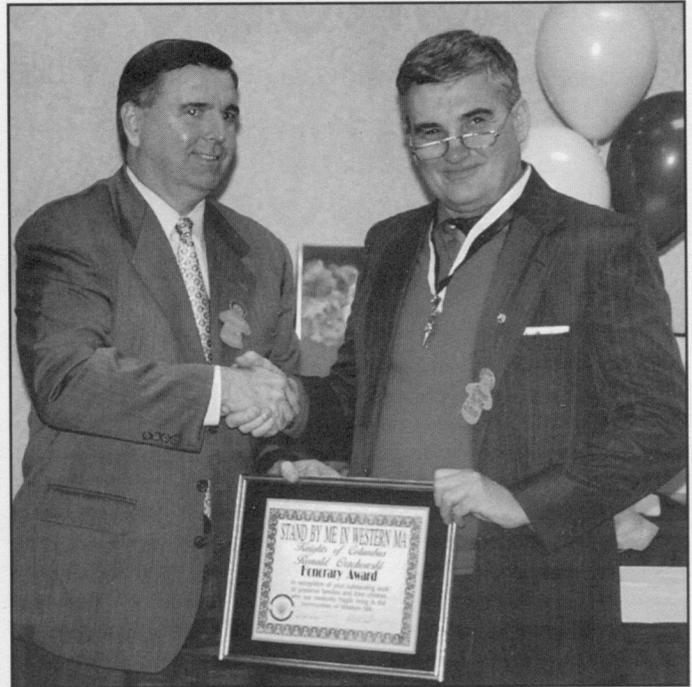
About 150 people attended the ceremony at the West Springfield Best Western. Orzechowski received his award from the children's charity group Family Bridges. The group recognized Orzechowski for successfully writing many grants for aid to the State Council of the Knights of Columbus.

The award recognized his "outstanding work to preserve families and their children who are medically fragile living in the communities of Western Massachusetts."

One of Orzechowski's grants involved widening a bathroom doorway so that a child's motorized wheelchair could go through. In the



PRIDE — TSgt. Orzechowski smiles after receiving the award for outstanding charitable work for children. Looking on is MSgt. John Tinnemeyer, superintendent of special handling at the 58th Aerial Port Squadron.



CONGRATULATIONS! — TSgt. Ronald Orzechowski, 58th APS NCOIC of special handling, receives an award from Gerry Morrissey, the Massachusetts commissioner with mental retardation. At the ceremony, Orzechowski made two more contacts of organizations needing special equipment for children.

child's house, the bathtub, bowl and sink were lowered so the child would be able to use the bathroom without aid.

"Each grant is specific to the need of the child," Orzechowski said.

Another grant he spearheaded resulted in the installation of ramps in front and back of a house for a five-year-old child with multiple sclerosis so he can go outside to play on his own in his wheelchair.

A third grant provided a computer and software to a high school teenager from West Springfield teen who broke her neck in a diving accident, rendering her a quadriplegic.

Orzechowski, a Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus from 1997 to 1998, said that in the nine years before he took over, the Western Massachusetts chapter of the Knights of Columbus—officially known as Council 2212—had given only one grant. Since then he's guided eight to ten grants through completion.

As Grand Knight, Orzechowski began calling hospitals, social services, and other charitable organizations to determine needs.

"I left my name in a lot of places," he said.

A professional tax accountant, Orzechowski co-owns R&R Tax Services in West Springfield.

Orzechowski said winning the award was a pleasant surprise.

"I never really considered it being in the public eye. It's just something I do in my free time."