

Dedicated club



Photos by STEVE SOMERVILLE



ROTARY SHINES: District Governor David Ing (top photo) presents John Pollard, president of the Stouffville Rotary Club with a plaque May 6 to commemorate the club's charter. Charter members gather in the background for the photo taken during a dinner at Sleepy Hollow Golf and Country Club. In photo at left, John Swick of the Bruce's Mill Conservation Area also presents Pollard with a cheque for \$2,500, raised from the Sugar Shack and pancake breakfast at the Mill's recent Maple Syrup Festival.

Autistic artist expresses himself in work

Stouffville's Danny Muller earning recognition for his artistic talents

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We've all heard that a picture's worth a thousand words—but for Danny Muller, his pictures are his words.

Muller, 23, is an artist. And a very exceptional one at that.

His smile is infectious, and his laughing dark eyes light up with pleasure as his mother proudly shows off his work.

And this young artist has every reason to be proud.

For even though Muller is unable to verbally communicate, he does express himself very eloquently through his paintings.

Diagnosed at the age of three as an autistic child, Muller's life has not been an easy one.

But his mother Josie, who's spent the past 20 years "fighting for Danny," said that through it all—the endless rounds of doctors, drugs, schools, and group homes—the one thing in Danny's life that has been a "constant" is his art.

Using wax, crayons and oil pastels on paper, he has developed his own very simple style. Vigorous colouring followed by a diligent process of scratching the surface with his fingernails creates a sense of depth, vitality, and movement in his work.

And Muller's sense of colour combinations, ever changing,

evokes an infinite number of moods.

He started painting at the age of 11 and never stopped. His mother recalled the family going on trips in the station wagon with Danny in the back, painting furiously all the way.

But at that time, and for years afterward, neither Josie—an artist herself—nor the rest of the family realized that his work was that of a "real" artist.

In 1990, Muller was accepted at Kerry's Place (a group home for autistic children). Two years later, while visiting Kerry's Place, the Dean of York University's Fine Arts Department was so overwhelmingly impressed by his paintings that he arranged a showing in December, 1992.

The work was well-received and Josie was told her son had a "natural talent."

Today, six years later, while continuing to paint under the watchful eye of art therapist Suzanne Bouduas, Muller is slowly but surely gaining recognition.

In March, Muller's work was exhibited at Walter Hall, University of Toronto. The show was by invitation from Judy Lomas, of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and Lawrence Spero, president of the board of directors of Haadd (Homes for Adults with Autism and Perva-



Stouffville artist Danny Muller, 23, speaks with his paintings.

Photo by LORI EMMERSON

sive Developmental Disorders.) Lomas is also the mother of an autistic child and founder of Haadd.

Hoping to bring together autistic artists, Haadd joined with Reena (a similar non-profit agency dedicated to helping developmentally challenged people) and together presented art by residents of Haadd, as well as crafts by clients of Reena.

Six of Muller's paintings were presented that evening, and Spero's wife was so "moved" by one of them that she purchased it immediately.

Josie then took the remaining five paintings and displayed them at her workplace, Loomis & Toles Art Supply in Thornhill. To her delight, the many artists who frequent the store never fail to be astounded when they learn that the artist is not only her son, but autistic as well.

"I finally believe it," said Josie. "I see with new eyes—my son's an artist!"

Muller presently resides at Jordan's Place (a home for autistic adults, funded by Kerry's Place) in Queensville, but spends every other weekend with his parents, brother, and sister at their Kennedy Road home in Stouffville.

His most recent works are on display at Jordan's Place, and sell for \$50, unframed.

Josie hopes that exposing her son's work to the public may help him gain some measure of independence in the future.

"I hope that people will become educated about autism. There's still so many who don't understand," she explained.