

columbine - tragedy and recovery
Treats cheer shooting victims

By Kevin Simpson
Denver Post Staff Writer

May 22 - Still recovering in his hospital bed with six bullet wounds, Columbine High School student Richard Castaldo couldn't attend President Clinton's speech Thursday. But Castaldo ended up hearing an even better message from the president.

The teenager was invited to the White House.

Castaldo's mother, Connie Michalik, said Friday the invitation came after she met privately with Bill and Hillary Clinton following the president's speech at Dakota Ridge High School. The mother is a longtime Clinton supporter who attended the 1993 Inaugural Ball in Arkansas.

"I thanked the president for coming, told him his speech was wonderful and then said I was sorry that Richard couldn't be here," Michalik said. "He said, "Why don't you bring him to the White House? If Richard wants to come, we'll set it all up."

The president also promised to help the mother contact paralyzed actor Christopher Reeve. Castaldo, who remains in fair condition at Swedish Medical Center, is paralyzed in part of his lower body, though his doctors and family hope the condition is temporary. When Castaldo was told about the president's White House invitation, "his whole face lit up," his mother said.

On Thursday, while many Columbine students were soothed and encouraged by the words of President Clinton, Lance Kirklin got a special treat of his own. Apple juice.

Just a week earlier, Kirklin had explained during a press conference at Denver Health Medical Center, where he was recovering from multiple gunshot wounds, how he thirsted for the juice - but his facial injuries prevented him from drinking anything.

Finally, he was able to sip and satisfy his craving.

"They went out to Albertson's and bought a case," said his lawyer, Tony Sturniolo. "He was so excited about being able to drink it. Sometimes it's the small victories that matter."

Kirklin had several uplifting moments during his stay in the hospital.

Two days before the rock group Aerosmith played Denver, the band visited him for about half an hour. At one point in the conversation, the group asked Kirklin to name his favorite song.

Then, at the start of their May 1 concert at Fiddler's Green, the band dedicated that song to him. Since Kirklin couldn't be there, Aerosmith dialed him up on a cell phone so he could hear the show.

But that wasn't Kirklin's only brush with fame. Country/rock crossover Shania Twain also came to see him - with none other than actress Bo Derek tagging along.

Group to debut

A new nationwide group called "The Bell Campaign: Freedom from Gun Trauma" will make its debut Tuesday with announcement ceremonies in five cities, including Denver. Tom Mauser, whose son, Daniel, was killed at Columbine, will be a featured speaker at the 10 a.m. ceremony on the east steps of the state Capitol.