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THE NEWS-ITEM

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EDITORIAL

Lourdes fortunate for alumni like Varano, options such as EITC

"School choice" remains a divisive issue, but it has manifested itself in our community through a simple yet effective — and politically neutral — program called the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC). Pennsylvania enacted the EITC in 2001, but it was five years ago when what some would likely consider a miracle began to impact Our Lady of Lourdes Regional School.

Lourdes alumnus Tony Varano and the alumni foundation focused on using the EITC to help the Coal Township school as its battle to survive was compounded by a tough economy and slumping local funds.

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According to the Reach Foundation (paschoolchoice.org) more than 51,000 students across Pennsylvania benefited from EITC scholarships this past year, and countless numbers of children in public schools benefited from innovative programs that would have likely have gone unfunded.

Since the program's inception, more than 23,500 business applications have been approved pledging in excess of \$657 million to the programs. Through the EITC, businesses can earn direct tax credits of 75 to 100 percent for business gifts up to \$750,000 per year. In effect, they can redirect business tax dollars to benefit children and education, with little or no cost to the business.

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Varano himself has pumped \$1,061,000 into Lourdes through EITC. As he said in deflecting some of the praise heaped upon him in a ceremony on Wednesday, it was a "mere" \$55,000 out of his own pocket; the remaining \$1,006,000 would have gone to business taxes but instead went to Lourdes.

We jest, of course, in saying a "mere" \$55,000; that alone is obviously a major contribution to one's high school alma mater. We pass along Varano's credit as well to alumnus and Lourdes board member Dr. Henry Fesniak, another major EITC contributor for the school.

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The bottom line is that efforts by Varano and other alumni have breathed new life into Lourdes. Enrollment has grown by more than 50 percent — from 350 to 530 students — since 2012, and there have been significant upgrades to equipment, curriculum and infrastructure.

As Reach promotes, "The EITC has accomplished what many in Pennsylvania have been advocating for years: to get the business community more involved in education. The EITC enables companies to support local nonprofit charities, at a minimal cost, instead of sending their tax dollars to Harrisburg. It's that simple."

But we know it takes more than a tax credit program. It takes the care and generosity of alumni like Varano to really make a difference.