

November 09, 2017

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THE NEWS-ITEM

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THE NEWS-ITEM

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Thursday, November 9, 2017

Lourdes honors alumnus for \$1M contribution through EITC program



HARRY DEITZ/FOR THE NEWS-ITEM Participants in a special program Wednesday at Our Lady of Lourdes Regional School included, from left, elementary principal Sister Maureen Donati, Tony Varano, CEO of DSG Inc., who was honored for donating more than \$1 million to the school through the EITC program, Bishop Ronald Gainer, state Rep. Kurt Masser, Lourdes dean of studies Doug Rubendall and Lourdes chaplain Father Andrew Stahmer.

COAL TOWNSHIP — Wednesday was a million dollar day at Our Lady of Lourdes Regional School.

The Most Rev. Ronald Gainer, bishop of the Diocese of Harrisburg, joined school officials, faculty, students and staff in honoring Tony Varano, a Lourdes graduate who has donated \$1,061,000 to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program for tuition assistance since 2012.

Varano, CEO of DSG Inc. in Malvern, a software company for life sciences, said he was happy to financially support his alma mater by giving hundreds of students an opportunity to attend Lourdes.

He pointed out that enrollment at Lourdes grew from approximately 350 to 530 students (51.4 percent) since 2012, which averages to about 35 new students each year. Students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade attend classes at the school.

Varano, whose successful company was founded in 1992, praised everyone who took important measures to increase enrollment at a time when the Catholic learning institution was in jeopardy of closing. He is a son of Tony and Kathleen Varano, of Elysburg, who were both in attendance.

Principal honored

Deacon Martin McCarthy, administrator and high school principal at Lourdes since 2010, was presented a plaque by Sister Maureen Donati, elementary school principal, on behalf of the school for his 25 years of outstanding dedication to providing Catholic education.

The 70-year-old deacon officially retired Wednesday due to health reasons. He served as master of ceremonies at the program honoring the second-year elementary principal will add the duties of acting executive director of the school with McCarthy's retirement.

Doug Rubendall, who serves as dean of studies, curriculum and technology director and teaches math and science classes, will serve as acting director of the high school.

McCarthy also served as dean of students and taught American history, government and religion during his two stints at Lourdes. The retiring principal, who referred to Lourdes as "the beacon on the hill," thanked everyone who has assisted him and Lourdes through the years.

'Mission of Faith'

Prior to the special ceremony, a stewardship and leadership assembly was conducted for students in grades seven to 12 in the Lee Korbich Memorial Gymnasium.

Following an address by the bishop to students, Tom Fertal, of Stewardship: A Mission of Faith, Elizabethtown, presented an inspirational and animated program about the importance of building relationships, following the rules or commandments to guide those relationships and keeping Jesus as the central focus in your life. Fertal stressed that it takes time, effort and energy to accomplish anything in life.



HARRY DEITZ/FOR THE NEWS-ITEM Tony Varano, a Lourdes alum who has contributed more than \$1 million to the school in tuition assistance through the Earned Income Tax Credit program, addresses students during a special ceremony Wednesday morning at the school.

Also offering remarks was Tom DeAngelis, of Stewardship: A Mission of Faith. At the conclusion of the program, Fertal, DeAngelis and Gainer distributed books to students entitled "Bible Basics for Catholics" — A New Picture of Salvation History by Dr. John Bergsma.

Contributions appreciated

Varano thanked McCarthy for his service to Lourdes and assistance with the EITC program. "He always goes out of his way to say kind things about me and the help we provided," he said. "He has been a great leader for the school and will be sorely missed."

The successful businessman also lauded Gainer for his support of Lourdes and the EITC program. Varano praised the students and their families for sending thank you cards to him for his generosity. He also commended Lourdes teachers, sisters, administrators, staff, board of education, local pastors and Lourdes development director Jacqueline Kerris, who has worked tirelessly with Varano and other EITC donors through the years.

Varano applauded the efforts of Dr. Henry Fesniak, a graduate of Lourdes and member of the Lourdes Board of Education, who is one of the largest contributors to the EITC program.

Local pastors and several members of the Lourdes Board of Education attended the ceremony. Spurred to act by rumors of closing the benefactor talked about when he first became involved with the EITC program, which started in 2012 when enrollment was about 350.



HARRY DEITZ/FOR THE NEWS-ITEM Bishop Ronald Gainer, right, and Tom Fertal, of Stewardship: A Mission of Faith, distribute religious books to Lourdes students Audrey Wilkins and Jessica Milewski following a stewardship and leadership assembly Wednesday at the school.

"The local pastors through their own weekly collections and fundraising were providing almost 40 percent of the school budget. The funds just weren't there, so it couldn't continue," he said. "The rumors were circulating that then-Bishop William McFadden had to make some very difficult decisions. I heard the same rumors others were hearing, so I contacted Jacqueline (Kerris) and Deacon McCarthy and then requested a meeting with Bishop McFadden."

Varano explained that McFadden, who passed away May 2, 2013, wanted to keep Lourdes operating. Varano and his longtime friend and high school classmate Cyril Zaneski met with McFadden. He said a business plan that included the EITC program was developed to address the financial status of the school.

EITC allows businesses to donate their state business taxes to help the school in the form of tuition assistance. He thanked state legislators for keeping the program alive.

Although the net benefit to Lourdes was \$1,061,000, Varano said his out of pocket contribution was only \$55,000. "The remaining \$1 million would have gone to business taxes, but instead went to Lourdes through the EITC program," he said.

'Very good deal' Varano said there are many businesses that probably want to give money to schools, but simply aren't aware of the program.

"Other businesses need to know that for every \$5 they give personally, they can contribute \$95 of their business taxes to the school," he said. "This is a very good deal for the school and we are very appreciative of the state legislators for their support."

Varano encouraged students to tell their parents and friends about EITC. As for returning to his alma mater, Varano said, "It's always good to come back home and see the success Lourdes is experiencing. It's very gratifying."

State Rep. Kurt Masser (R-107), of Elysburg, offered remarks about the benefits of the EITC program. "It's a program we truly believe in and expect to grow in the future," he said.

During his invocation and closing prayer, the bishop thanked Varano, McCarthy, the EITC program, the business community, state legislators, Lourdes students, faculty and staff, local pastors and parishioners and everyone who supports Catholic education.

He pointed out that there are seven Catholic high schools and 35 elementary schools in the 15 counties served by the Diocese of Harrisburg that benefit from the EITC program.



At the conclusion of the ceremony, students presented a banner to Varano that read: Thanks A Million.

A luncheon was served in the school library following the program.