

Catholic education supporters celebrate with GALA 22:6

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The mood was festive, hearts were joyful and the spirit of giving remained strong at the annual Gala 22:6 - A Celebration of Catholic Education, held Feb. 21, at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center.

While Buffalo winter storms delayed the event a couple of weeks from its originally scheduled date, it did not tarnish the excitement and commitment of those who attended. By all accounts, it was a huge success, as the Gala raises funds solely dedicated to need-based tuition assistance for families across Western New York.

"We believe that the greatest gift one can give is a robust, Catholic education," said Dr. Michael LaFever, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Buffalo. "This special evening is our chance to help ensure that."

The Gala's theme was "A Place to Belong," and it showcased the endless possibilities afforded to children who attend Catholic schools. The cocktail reception featured the event's first-ever student art show, where work from students pre-K – eighth grade was displayed and up for auction. The Gala also honored individuals who have made an impact on their school communities in meaningful ways – both in and out of the classroom.

In reflecting on the honorees, Bishop Richard J. Malone said, "From the classroom to the boardroom, these individuals advance the educational mission of our Catholic schools and encourage our children to live a life that is in keeping with the Gospel message."

This year's honorees included Katherine K. Juhasz and John C. Dwyer, who both received the Champions of Catholic Education: The Bishop's Medal.

Additionally, two very special people were in the spotlight: Colleen Millette, a pre-K3 teacher at St. Amelia School in Tonawanda, who received The Tim Russert Lucille Socciarelli & Fr. John Sturm "Making



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Bishop Richard J. Malone, presents longtime supporter of Catholic education John C. Dwyer, of Batavia, the Bishop's Medal at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center during the Gala 22:6 "A Celebration of Catholic Education."

a Difference" Award and Gabrielle Adamczyk, a seventh-grader from SS. Peter & Paul School in Williamsville, who received the Natalie Mattimore Lewis "Kindness Counts" Character Award.

"We are grateful and humbled by the example these individuals set in representing the best our Catholic schools offer as we celebrate them this evening," said Bishop Malone.

"During this most difficult time for our Diocese of Buffalo," remarked Richard Suchan, executive director at The Foundation of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, which hosts the event, "many may feel disenfranchised and looking for an effective way to participate in the Church's mission. With Gala 22:6, every cent goes directly to tuition scholarships. There's no better gift we could give to the next generation of Catholics."

Here's what some who attended the Gala had to say:

• Nancy Langer, president of the NativityMiguel School of Buffalo – "I am here in appreciation for the wonderful things the Bison Fund has done for our Catholic schools, for

Catholic school children. To come to a dinner that is a celebration and is going to turn into good scholarship money for our kids, is a blessing."

• Tracy Ficorilli, St. Andrews Country Day School, STREAM Coordinator – "We are doing wonderful things with our kids, especially in science, technology, religion, engineering, the arts and math. People that come out and bid on items tonight, help support STREAM financially at our schools. The diocese provides us with a lot of training. I was just at an event to help us learn how to integrate technology into the classroom, with things like Adobe Spark and Google classroom. Having this support helps me as the student coordinator for our school and it helps our teachers. We can update our technology and our classrooms. We need the resources so we can continue the great things that Catholic education has going on."

• Pat Tronconi – "I've always grown up in a family with Catholic education. My children are participating in Catholic education. We really value what they've received from doing that. That's why we're

here."

• Laura Zaepfel, vice president of Corporate Relations, Uniland Development Company – "Catholic education is incredibly valuable to this community. Uniland has been involved with, not only this event, but the diocese for many years. The kind of education our Catholic community brings to a child is second to none. We look at the products of Catholic education. You're educating the whole person – body, mind, spirit – and the entire STREAM program is superb. We're very big supporters of Catholic education and will continue to be for years to come. It's all about Catholic education and this is the premier event where you can support it."

• Ellen Koessler – "I have always been an absolute proponent of Catholic education. All of my children have gone to Catholic grammar schools and high schools and some, college. I feel Catholic education is so important. It teaches values that coincide with our home life and school life and being involved with people of the same ilk brings camaraderie. It's just something that draws people together to worship God and His Blessed Mother in every aspect of life. That's what I tried to do with all of my children and I think they've all gotten the message. My oldest grandson is Peter Santandreu, who was just ordained a priest."

Bishop Malone explained the inspiration upon which the event is built.

"Gala 22:6 is inspired by Proverbs 22:6 which says, 'Train up children in a way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it,' the bishop said. "The mission of Catholic education is to instill in our children both the timeless values and the advanced curriculum necessary to go forth into the world to be successful in their careers as committed disciples of Christ. We need to cultivate a generation of learned, resilient and compassionate future leaders. It is our desire to see our students make an impact in His image. On behalf of the Diocese of Buffalo, I offer my sincere thanks for your generous support."