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Lourdes Regional Celebrates \$1 Million EITC Milestone, 51% Enrollment Increase

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The numbers tell the story.

Five years ago, Our Lady of Lourdes Regional School in Coal Township was in a dire position. There were 350 students enrolled in the PreK-12 school, and area parishes were funding 40 percent of its operating budget. The school was losing students after their eighth and ninth grade year, as tuition costs increased. EITC funding to support tuition assistance for families was at \$14,000.

There were rumors that the school would close. Lourdes needed a lifeline.

Working with school administrators, businessman and graduate Tony Varano developed a business plan, which included a push for more companies to get involved in the EITC program. An acronym for Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit program, it offers tax credits to eligible businesses contributing to a scholarship organization, thus assisting families with financial assistance and retaining – and attracting – students in the school that best meets their needs.

As CEO of DSG, Inc., in Malvern, Pa., Mr. Varano led the charge in participating in the EITC program and calling forth other businesses to do the same. To date, his business has contributed \$1,061,000.

To celebrate this milestone, Our Lady of Lourdes Regional School held an EITC celebration on Nov. 8, welcoming Bishop Ronald Gainer, Mr. Varano, State Rep. Kurt Masser (R-107), area pastors and members of the school board.

“Several years ago, the Chairperson of the Accreditation for Middle States called Our Lady of Lourdes a beacon on



Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Maureen Donati and Bishop Ronald Gainer congratulate Deacon Martin McCarthy on his retirement after 25 years of dedicated service to Catholic education, as principal at St. Monica School in Sunbury and as teacher, administrator and principal at Our Lady of Lourdes Regional High School. On the occasion of his retirement this month, Lourdes has established the Deacon Martin P. McCarthy Building Fund. Sister Maureen, who is the elementary principal there, will serve as interim administrator during the transition.

the hill, and truly it is,” remarked Deacon Martin McCarthy, principal, who is retiring this month after 25 years in Catholic education.

He commended the community, faculty and staff, school board, parents, grandparents, alumni and leaders who have supported the school.

The EITC program helps hundreds of families every year here at Lourdes,” Deacon McCarthy said. “In 2011-

2012, we had \$14,000 in EITC money, and we helped 20-some families. By 2014, we were getting over \$200,000 and helping hundreds of families. This year, over \$315,000 is available for parents and families to keep their kids here at Lourdes.”

Where five years ago, students were leaving Lourdes before their high school years because of cost, “kids are now coming from all over the area because they want to be here,” he said, noting a current enrollment of 530.

Speaking about “a program that I truly believe in,” Rep. Masser called the EITC program a joy for the region.

“I see what EITC means for parents who are able to send their children to a school that they truly believe in,” he remarked. “There are large classes here at Lourdes Regional, and it’s great to see.... We want to see Lourdes Regional continue to thrive and grow.”

Mr. Varano expressed gratitude “for what the Pennsylvania legislators have done to make this program available to business communities.”

“It’s a great program, but a lot of people aren’t aware of it, and so we have to spread the word,” he said. “I am grateful to the PA legislators that, as a business leader, I can give to this school and take advantage of this great state program.”

Speaking at the conclusion of the event, Bishop Gainer pointed out, “So many of our Catholic school students in this diocese would not be in our schools if it were not for the advantages that their families have to get assistance through the EITC program.”

“We are so fortunate that this legislation program is available in Pennsylvania, and it is an advantage to the business community and for our students.”

(Learn more about Our Lady of Lourdes Regional School by visiting www.lourdes.k12.pa.us. To find out more information about business participation in the EITC program through the diocese’s Neumann Scholarship Foundation, visit the “Giving and Development” link at www.hbgdiocese.org or call the Diocesan Office of Development at 717-657-4804, ext. 245.)



CHRIS HEISEY, THE CATHOLIC WITNESS

Students fill the gymnasium Nov. 8 to celebrate the \$1 million milestone in EITC funding from businessman and graduate Tony Varano. In the past five years, Lourdes has increased its scholarship assistance through EITC from \$14,000 to \$315,000, and its enrollment from 350 students to 530.