



Greg Francie/Staff photographer

Sixth-grader Corey O'Neill shows Eileen Kellman to her seat at the beginning of the Sunshine Luncheon May 19 at St. Louis School, Pittsford.

Luncheon serves up rays

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — Ida Grassi, a resident of the Highlands Living Center, 500 Hahnemann Trail, grinned as she surveyed the scene at "The Sunshine Luncheon" in the St. Louis School's Reddington Hall.

"The hors d'oeuvres were good," she said. "They were put out very nicely."

And the sixth-graders serving them?

"They were all very good," Grassi said.

Grassi's compliments are exactly what Marie Stekloff wanted to hear from the 230 senior citizens who came to St. Louis May 19. Stekloff co-chaired the event along with Susan Rooney and Louise McQuillen. This year marked the 20th anniversary of the luncheon, which is put on annually by the St. Louis community and students.

"I think it's been very successful,"

Stekloff said of this year's luncheon. "You just see a general happiness among the people who are coming."

The residents of 19 Monroe County nursing homes, along with a number of homebound parishioners, were invited to the luncheon, Stekloff said. Close to 150 volunteers helped with set-up, cooking and hosting at the luncheon, she said. Doris Schmidt was one of those volunteers.

"I love the elderly and just enjoy being with them and seeing their smiling faces and appreciating all we do for them," she said.

The Rochester chapter of the Sweet Adelines singing group provided entertainment at the event, as did a bell choir and string orchestra of school students.

A singer who has performed at each of the luncheons, Tom Hickey, made what was to be his last performance this year —



Charles Van Dyne applauds the St. Louis sixth-grade bell choir during its performance at the Sunshine Luncheon. He said he likes the bells, noting, "I listen to (bells) every Christmas on TV."

Mr. Hickey died unexpectedly at the age of 89 June 7.

A sixth-grader at the luncheon, Conor O'Neil, said he enjoyed bringing food out to the senior citizens there.

"It makes them feel like they're in sixth grade," he said. "They like to tell you stuff about their childhood ..."

Abby Dwyer, another student server, said she liked socializing with the guests.

"It's a good reason to help other people," she said of the luncheon. "Most of the time, because of the condition they're in, they don't get a chance to get out."

Several people commented on the value of the generations interacting.

"A lot of time the older generation is looked down upon," said Sarah Leisten, an employee of the Highlands Living Center. "I think it's good to have the younger gen-

eration connect and be around the older generation, to appreciate everyone."

Ronald Augustine, a sixth-grader, seemed to embody Leisten's sentiments in his comments about the guests.

"I wanted to do this because I wanted to meet them," he said. "I wanted to give my effort to make the serving better, and give them a chance to come out of the nursing homes and have them meet my friends."

Mary Amey served as chairwoman of the first luncheon in 1978. She sat with other women who helped launch the luncheon back then — Cookie Knight, Linda McConville-Lechner, Mary Murphy and Molly Burden, who herself coined the name, "The Sunshine Luncheon."

"To me, this Sunshine Luncheon is a win-win, no-lose activity," Amey said. "(I)t's a break for (the guests), and the kids who come learn a lot about giving and the satisfaction that it gives."

Father James A. Schwartz, pastor of St. Louis, echoed Amey's comments.

"I think it's just a wonderful intergenerational event," he said. "I think it's just a wonderful way of living out the Eucharist."

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