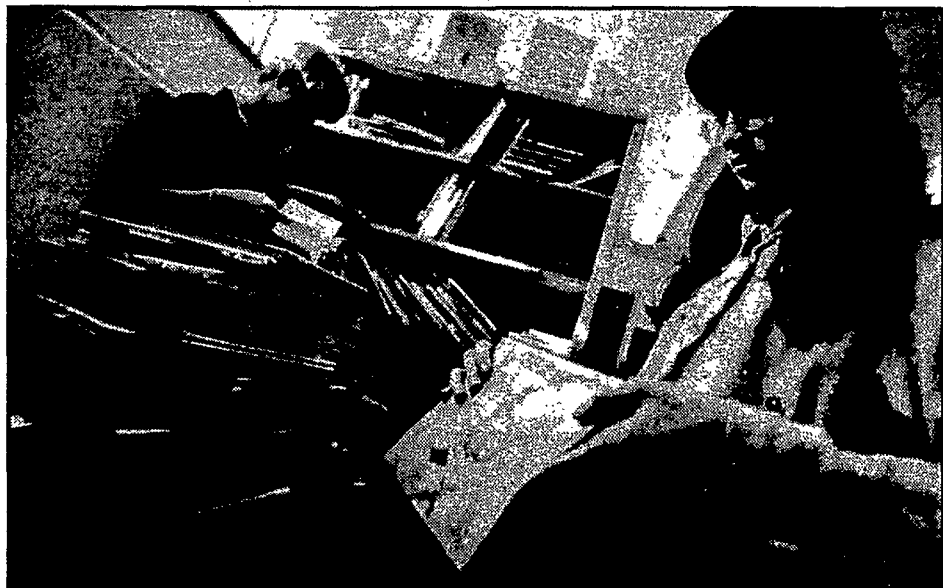


FEATURE

Ithaca school children value service to others



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Elizabeth Frantz, right, a seventh-grader at Immaculate Conception School, Ithaca, helps organize and alphabetize books in the school's library Feb. 4.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

On Wednesday, Feb. 3, Immaculate Conception School in Ithaca was site of a historic afternoon basketball game as part of its Catholic Schools Week celebrations.

In an exclusive phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, seventh-grader Lillian Yavits shared the winning secrets of the students' team to which she belonged. Her team bested an opposing team of school parents and staff.

Yavits proudly noted that the students beat the parents 76-34, despite the fact that "most of the parents were taller than us." But, Yavits was asked, did the students' win also have something to do with the fact that aging has slowed down the taller adults?

"Sort of," she replied diplomatically.

Apparently, though, Immaculate school parents will have nothing to worry about if old age eventually slows them down to the point where their children must take care of them. For the school has made taking care of others not only an important part of Catholic Schools Week, but a regular part of the students' curriculum, according to Anne Woodard, the school's chairwoman of marketing and publicity. From charity fundraising efforts to food pantry volunteerism, students regularly work on projects aiding Ithaca's citizens in need, she said.

"We feel really as a Christian community that we need to give back to the community we live in," said Woodard, whose daughter, Allison, is an eighth-grader in the school for grades pre-K through eight.

During Catholic Schools Week — which the Ithaca school and a number of Southern Tier schools celebrated Feb. 1-5, a week ahead of the rest of the diocese — Immaculate's 190 students took on a variety of

community service tasks, Woodard said.

Four-year-old preschoolers made St. Valentine's Day cards for senior citizens in local nursing homes. Meanwhile, fifth-, sixth- and eighth-graders raised money for children's charities by buying their way out of homework at 25 cents per problem, Woodard said. Her daughter spent \$2.50 of the allowance she gets for doing chores to get out of doing the math work, she said.

"Math is not one of her favorite subjects," Woodard noted of Allison.

Prior to Catholic Schools Week, many of the school's students and staff volunteered to paint and clean the school. And during the week itself, seventh-graders organized the school library.

On Feb. 2 — as they do three Tuesdays a month — sixth- and eighth-grade students helped sort food for the parish's community pantry. It operates weekly in rotation with other community pantries serving people in need, Woodard said.

Kathy Wood — who teaches English to students to grades five through eight — noted that working in the food pantry teaches valuable lessons. Students must follow directions, solve problems and realize that others do not have what they have, she said.

"They learn not to be so self-centered," she said. "They learn to offer help, rather than wait to be asked."

Like Woodard, Wood pointed out that community service is a feature at the school all year long. For example, she said, instead of buying each other Secret Santa Christmas presents this year, students bought presents for children in the community who otherwise wouldn't have any, she said.

Wood's comments were echoed by seventh-grader Brandon Sforzo, who organized a music program featuring the school's younger children for the Feb. 3 bas-



Kristina-Marie McCoy, an Immaculate Conception School fifth-grader, takes part in a "homework buyout" program. Students donated the money to charity.

ketsball game.

"I think most of the kids see the community service projects as a good thing," he said. "They learn not to rule (needy people) out, and to let them be part of the community."

As part of its effort to recruit new students, Immaculate Conception highlighted its community service efforts, academic programs and other assets in the local media during Catholic Schools Week, Woodard noted. She noted that the week began with six Immaculate students appearing on Casey Steven's morning radio show on WHCU 870 AM on Feb. 1. The students were her daughter Allison, seventh-graders Matt Cedar and Mimi Bavecy,

and sixth-graders Peter Corina, Jennifer Terwilliger and Jaffa Bush, she said.

Apparently the publicity paid off because the school drew more than 100 people to its open house on Tuesday night, Feb. 2, Woodard said.

"We even had people who didn't have kids come," she said. "They came to find out what we were about."

She added that, as the only Catholic school in Ithaca, Immaculate needs to promote its values and projects regularly if it wants to continue attracting new students.

"Sometimes, I think people forget about us," she said of Immaculate. "(Catholic Schools Week) is a good time to put us in the limelight."

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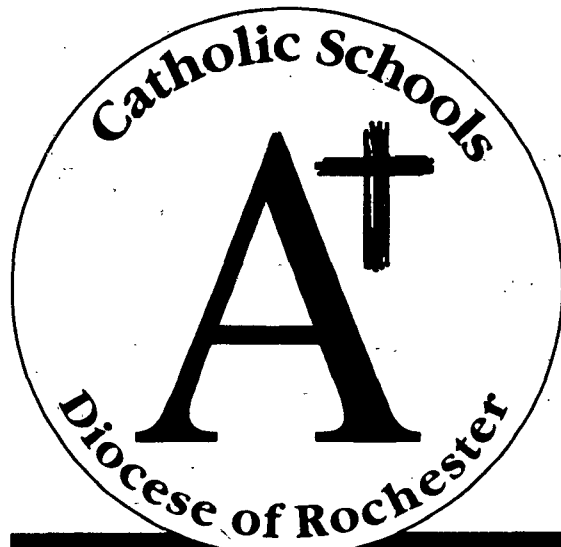
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