

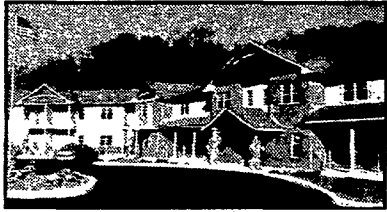
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Finger Lakes

Continued from page 1

ger Lakes Region," said Peter Koch, chairman of the school's board of trustees, in February. DeSales officials noted that the donors were helping to back the school's

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plan to increase enrollment from the current 146 to 200 in the next few years.

Among benefits already generated by the donation, DeSales Principal Daniel Skinner noted that endowment fund revenue enabled the school to expand its tuition assistance for the upcoming school year.

"I'd say we've drawn in a half-dozen students who wouldn't even consider us if we didn't have additional aid," he said.

The school has also hired a full-time computer technician, improved its computer and science programs, and plans to repair and improve the school's physical plant. To compete with public schools in today's market, Catholic schools have to continually upgrade their facilities, he said, a tough task given that Catholic schools have less money to play with than publicly financed facilities.

"The reality you have to face today is you have to have an attractive building or physical plant or people simply and plainly are not inclined to choose you," Skinner said.

Meanwhile, the six elementary schools were to receive gift installments annually for the next 10 years. Having received the first of these installments this year, the feeders generally used the money in similar fashions: to improve their computer, technology and science programs; to provide bonuses or salary enhancement to teachers; to send their teachers and administrators to professional development workshops; to promote their schools through such media vehicles as TV spots; and to provide tuition assistance to families.

The donors' money allowed the Finger Lakes elementary schools to breathe a little easier in terms of budgeting for facility and programming improvements, according to Ann Marie Deutsch, principal of St. Mary's, Canandaigua.

"There's just been a lot of things that we wouldn't have been able to do at one time," she said.

She noted, for example, that her school

has or will be installing new windows, doors, computers, science tables and carpeting by this fall. She added that 20 families benefited from the financial assistance made possible by the donors.

The schools also used portions of the grants for specific budget desires.

For example, Fred Smith, principal of St. Mary's, Waterloo, said a portion of his school's first installment helped finance a pilot watershed education project developed in collaboration with several area water quality groups as well as Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge.

The project trained teachers to present lessons on such subjects as the historic and economic impacts of the area's watersheds on all life in the region. The watershed project enabled students at St. Mary's to participate in computer-guided tracking of a songbird's migratory flight from the area to Argentina; the raising and release of 100 butterflies; and the "adoption" of a small island that students cleaned up. Smith noted that the program was in the works before the donors' money was available. However the money, when matched with other sources of funding, enabled the watershed project to achieve a level of sophistication it would not have otherwise, he said.

That view was echoed by Mary Catt, the watershed project organizer, whose son, Christopher, 9, will attend fourth grade this fall and whose daughter, Elizabeth, 8, will attend third grade. The former chairwoman of the Seneca County Water Quality Committee, Catt said the donors' generosity showed a tremendous faith in her school's ability to give the kids a quality educational experience.

"This is the icing on the cake, to think that somebody thinks enough of the school to contribute that much, and to do it in such a heartfelt manner, anonymously," she said.

Year of miracles

The gift from the anonymous donors has also enabled the Finger Lakes schools to undertake numerous new programs and enhance existing ones, school officials said.

Take, for example, St. Francis DeSales/St. Stephen, which stands just down the street from DeSales. Elaine Morrow, school principal, said students with special needs have had to leave the school for part of the day, to receive instruction in area public schools. Now the school has created a resource room staffed with a teacher available for students with special learning needs, a teacher who can also work in the school's classrooms, she said.

She added that the school plans to have its students write and publish its quarterly newsletter — formerly written by an adult —

starting next year, another project possible in part because of the large grant.

"That'll be a really neat way for us to get out the good news about the school because the kids will be able to decide what is the good news," she said.

The donors' grant was a gift that embodied the school's philosophy, she said.

"Our motto last year was 'Expect Miracles' and God certainly provided us with miracles throughout the year," she said.

Jo Ann Struck, principal of St. Michael's School, Penn Yan, said the donors' money enabled her to extend tuition assistance to almost double the number of families she would have been able to aid otherwise. She was also able to purchase classroom supplies that have been paid for sometimes by the school's teachers themselves, she said.

St. Patrick's, Seneca Falls, was able to enhance its Internet capabilities and its science programs through the donors' funds, according to Jill Cifarratta, director of development. The parent of two students at St. Patrick's, Cifarratta said students have benefited tremendously from the school's technological upgrading.

"When you see third-graders get on the Internet and research a project, it's amazing," she said.

Debbie Hall, the school's computer teacher, said the funding made available this year allowed the school to create a computer lab where she could train students.

"The teachers can now work on curriculum rather than having to teach them how to use the computer," she said.

Keep it coming

All of the school's representatives emphasized that while they were grateful for the donors' generosity, they still need support from donors of all kinds, whether they can give \$50 or \$5 million.

Some schools plan on tapping alumni for more donations in the future, while others plan more extensive fundraisers. But all the schools have one ultimate goal, according to Koch — raising the visibility of Catholic education in the Finger Lakes region.

"Your goal is to get to heaven, and we should be exposing our children to everything there is that gets them to heaven," Koch said. "I think that DeSales can be the hub of Catholic education in the Finger Lakes."

Koch may be heartened, then, to read the simply stated comment of Emily Schillaci, an eighth-grader at St. Francis DeSales/St. Stephen. When asked where she planned to go to high school, she replied "DeSales."

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