

Dream a little dream

Charities Ball funds reach people in need

Even different ministries from throughout the Erie Diocese had the opportunity to dream a little bit this fall when proceeds from the Catholic Charities Ball were made available to them through a series of grants. FAITH is pleased to present a look at some of the ways the funds are making an impact.

Catholic Rural Ministries, Port Allegany

▶▶ “It was a good feeling to be able to plan how we can reach the people most in need,” says Sister Phyllis Schleicher, OSB, who received \$4,000 from Catholic Charities on behalf of Catholic Rural Ministries. She and Sister Mary William Hoffman, OSB, who oversee the work of CRM in Potter and McKean counties, will use the funds to create and serve a special holiday meal close to Thanksgiving, to purchase clothing and school supplies to be distributed to area children in need at Christmas and to distribute grocery store gift certificates after the New Year.

“These funds gave us a chance to address the most basic human needs creatively during the winter months,” says Sister Phyllis.

Having moved to Port Allegany nearly 10 years ago with the charge of establishing “a compassionate presence of women religious in the northeastern-most corner of the Erie Diocese,” the sisters have learned a great deal about unearthing and addressing the needs of the poor.

“We had corn, corn, corn from our garden this summer,” Sister



Mary recalls. “One day we stopped to give some to a family we knew on our way back from Coudersport. They introduced us to another family in need, but the second family had no gas, no way of cooking it.” That night, Sister Mary cooked the corn for the family herself.

“You should have seen the faces on those kids,” she says.

That experience led to the sisters’ decision to coordinate a festive meal close to Thanksgiving, with a portion of the proceeds from the Charities Ball.

“You can’t always just drop off food,” Sister Mary says. “Many people simply don’t have the resources needed to cook something like a turkey.”

The Prince of Peace Center, Shenango Valley

▶▶ The Prince of Peace Center in the Shenango Valley, which works hard to ensure it does not duplicate services provided by any other funding source, will use 100 percent of its \$5,000 Catholic Charities Ball funding for direct client support. Having lost a projected total of \$30,000 formerly provided by the cash-strapped Federal Emergency Management Agency, the center will now be positioned to help a wider range of clients including the elderly living on a fixed income, the working poor and the homeless.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Center, Oil City

▶▶ “I have no doubt in my mind that when dealing with charity on any level, God is most definitely involved,” says Tim Wren, acting director of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Center in Oil City. “I have seen proof of that time and time again.”

The center will use its \$5,000 grant to purchase food for families in need. Parishioners in Oil City regularly bring food donations to Mass for distribution through the St. Elizabeth Center. The



The Stark family, including Beata, Marie and Norman “Buddy,” enjoyed time with Atty. Jim McNamara and his wife, Barb, at the 2007 Catholic Charities Ball.



organization also receives many private donations.

But Wren says the grant brought tremendous relief. “It just takes the worry and financial burden off of us when we have money to stretch the food we need to buy,” he says. “This put us in a better position to get through until at least December.”

Wren, who will be ordained as a permanent deacon in May, says he no longer uses the phrase, “I can’t believe it.”

“There are just graces in this ministry that go beyond explanation,” he says. He counts the timing of the funds from the Charities Ball among those gifts.

St. Martin Center, Erie

▶▶ Many social service agencies encounter emergency needs they simply cannot respond to, in part because funds are

designated for very specific purposes. This year, the St. Martin Center in Erie will use a \$5,000 grant from Catholic Charities Ball proceeds to assist clients with emergency rent, mortgage and utility costs.

Individuals living at or below 150 percent of the poverty line will benefit from the funds.

“There are just graces in this ministry that go beyond explanation.”

Caseworkers at St. Martin Center, who work with approximately 16,000 individuals in need of emergency services each year, will continue helping clients to resolve their situations and to determine additional funding sources that might be available to them.

The Charities grant will provide a much-needed source to help bridge the gap for those experiencing crisis.

▶▶ The Office of Disability and Deaf Ministries plans to host a retreat for those with mental health issues in the Erie and Oil City areas. As many as 85 percent of the people involved in the ongoing spiritual support groups in place for this population live at the poverty line or below and would not be able to contribute to the cost of such an opportunity.



▶▶ Better Housing for Erie will use its \$5,000 grant to purchase academic materials to enhance several initiatives for children in poverty including the “Learn it to Earn It” program, the “Positive Peers” initiative, a community beautification effort and health and wellness seminars.



Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services, DuBois and Sharon

▶▶ People in both Sharon and DuBois will soon be learning more about the variety of services available to them through Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services, as a \$5,000 grant will allow radio and print advertising to promote their efforts.

“Our staff reaches out to people in a wide area, from Warren and Clearfield to Bradford and St. Marys,” says Robert McCrarey, director of Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services for the Erie Diocese. “We know it’s important to increase the awareness of the services we provide to those who may not otherwise be able to afford them.”

The agency uses a sliding fee scale, depending on both family size and income.

“The campaign will also give us another opportunity to remind people that our services are available to people of all faiths,” says McCrarey.

Catholic Charities is especially grateful to Saint Vincent Health System for leading the way as a Platinum Circle sponsor of the ball. Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield also stepped up as a Gold Circle sponsor.

“Attendees, sponsors and individual benefactors, who contributed between \$50 and \$5000-plus, have made a tremendous impact on thousands of lives in the Erie Diocese through their support of the Catholic Charities Ball and we are deeply grateful,” says Emma Lee McCloskey, who coordinated planning of the event.

Plan now to get in step with next year’s ball on Friday, April 18 at the new Bayfront Convention Center in Erie. The committee is energized with some creative fun it promises will take your breath away. ☺

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