

The Catholic Accent

The Official Publication of the Diocese of Greensburg

December 16, 2004

Area schools benefit when supporters shop

By Cheryl Collins Valyo, Special to the Catholic Accent

NORTH HUNTINGDON – At an increasing number of Catholic schools in the diocese, parents are helping to boost school income and reduce tuition bills by simply shopping as they usually do for groceries and other necessities.

The secret is "scrip," a term which means substitute money. It's a fund-raising concept born in California more than a decade ago that has been rapidly spreading to private, parochial and public schools across the country.

Here's how it works. Schools purchase gift certificates, or scrip, from popular retailers (like Giant Eagle, Burger King and Kohl's) at a discount, which guarantees the stores customers as well as goodwill advertising. Parents then buy the gift certificates or prepaid cards, at face value, from the school.

The difference in price is kept by the school. Parents spend the scrip at the retailer, where it's worth the full face value. They haven't spent an extra dime to help the school, nor have they had to change stores.

School earnings add up quickly, according to Joann Perz, who leads a group of parent volunteers in coordinating the scrip program at Queen of Angels School in North Huntingdon. It was started four years ago and today earns tens of thousands of dollars annually for the school.

At Queen of Angels, 75 percent of the profits are returned to participating families to reduce tuition bills and 25 percent provides general school support. Each school creates its own model for profit distribution.

"We sold about \$110,000 the first year," says Perz, adding that more than half of Queen of Angels families now participate in the program. "The second year, our first full year, we sold about \$400,000. Last year we sold \$705,000, and this year we're on target to sell the same amount."

Most schools work with a broker such as the Great Lakes Scrip Center to avoid the challenge of enlisting merchants on their own and to ensure the deep discounts obtained when a scrip center buys gift certificates in large volume. Scrip brokers retain

a small portion of the school's profits in exchange for their services.

Other diocesan schools running scrip programs are Holy Rosary School, Republic; All Saints School, Masontown; Holy Cross School, Youngwood; Conn-Area Catholic School, Connellsville; Aquinas Academy, Greensburg; Mother of Sorrows School, Murrysville; Sacred Heart School, Youngwood; and both high schools, Greensburg Central Catholic and Geibel Catholic, Connellsville.

"We have been running a scrip program for about 12 years, and it has proven to be very successful," says Annette Forsythe, scrip coordinator at Holy Cross School. "This year alone we are

projecting sales around \$400,000. We have enlisted not only the parents but also the parish to participate.

Our program here is very well stocked, with over 40 vendors ready to be sold at a moment's notice. Our turnover for Christmas is tremendous. I am looking to do at least \$40,000 in sales for the month of December," Forsythe adds.

Brian Casey, development director at Geibel Catholic High School in Connellsville, says his school introduced a scrip fundraising program two years ago.

"The program really works on volume. If every family is involved in the program at just a minimal level, a significant amount of money can be generated," Casey says. "The key is for families to get extended families involved in the process."

"Everybody has to eat and buy clothes," says Perz, who has four children and estimates that she earned a discount of about \$1,200 on her tuition bill last year by using scrip to pay for ordinary household purchases.

"The wrapping paper is nice, the candy is nice, but I don't really need it," says Perz. "Scrip certificates can be exchanged dollar for dollar and I can use them every day. I keep these things in my car. It's the most basic of fund-raisers."

"The wrapping paper is nice, the candy is nice, but I don't really need it. Scrip certificates can be exchanged dollar for dollar and I can use them every day."

**Joan Perez
Queen of Angels School
parent and volunteer.**
