

Archdiocese partners with piano company

The piano Jeff Bunn has been using for music instruction at Our Lady of Mount Carmel High School in Middle River has seen better days. Now more than 35 years old, the well-used instrument is out of tune and long overdue for retirement.

That's why Mr. Bunn couldn't be more elated that not one, but two brand-new pianos were scheduled to be delivered to his parish campus the week of Jan. 8 - one for the high school and one for Our Lady of Mount Carmel Elementary School.

"It's like night and day," he said with a laugh. "This campus has never had a new instrument. Even the pipe organ in the church was from a parish that closed."

The long-awaited new instruments are the result of a new partnership between the Archdiocese of Baltimore and Jason's Music Center of Pasadena that provides new instruments to archdiocesan schools.

Six acoustical pianos and eight digital pianos will be loaned to schools throughout the archdiocese in the coming weeks. The schools do not have to pay to participate in the program.

Steve Cohen, owner of the music store, started a similar program in the public schools several years ago that has grown nationwide. Including Catholic schools was the idea of Tom Bonvegna, a parishioner of Our Lady of Pompei in Highlandtown, who works with Mr. Cohen.

In exchange for receiving the new pianos, participating Catholic schools will encourage parents to support Jason's Music Center. Once a year, the pianos will be replaced with new ones. The used instruments will then be offered for sale at steep discounts.

"I'm supporting music education and I'm also receiving the value of publicity to me as a retailer," said Mr. Cohen, who has received national awards for developing the innovative piano-sharing partnership.

Piano manufacturers who help sponsor the program also benefit by having their brands publicized in the schools – which fosters loyalty, Mr. Cohen said.

“Everyone comes out a winner,” he said. “The schools absolutely love it.”

Kathy Sipes, principal of Our Lady of Mount Carmel High School, called the program “very generous.” The pianos will be used for music instruction and for school liturgies, she said. There are 200 students involved in the music program at the elementary and high schools at Mount Carmel, according to Mr. Bunn.

Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, superintendent of Catholic schools, said he was very excited about the new partnership.

“It’s just marvelous,” he said.

Other participating schools are: Immaculate Heart of Mary, Baynesville; Mother Mary Lange, Baltimore; Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Ellicott City; St. Clare, Essex; St. Francis of Assisi, Baltimore; St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Pasadena; St. John’s Catholic Prep, Frederick; St. Margaret, Bel Air; The Catholic High School of Baltimore; Our Lady Queen of Peace, Middle River; St. Mary, Annapolis; Mount St. Joseph, Irvington and Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Baltimore.