

# **Basilica sets seasonal tone for charity Christmas concert**

The rich, melodic sound of horns filled Baltimore's Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Dec. 13, ushering in the Christmas season for patrons of Catholic Charities' Christmas festival.

More than 620 ticketholders assembled in the restored basilica for the evening of yuletide favorites, which benefitted Gallagher Services, a Timonium-based program serving individuals with developmental disabilities.

Concert organizers were thrilled with the nearly sold-out affair, and Catholic Charities has resolved to make it an annual event to benefit different programs each year.

Next year's concert has already been scheduled for Dec. 11, 2008, at the basilica and will benefit Jenkins Senior Living Community in Baltimore.

"This is a historic event in this most historic basilica," said Harold A. Smith, executive director of Catholic Charities.

As the overture gave way to the moving voices of the choirs of the Concert Artists of Baltimore and the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, smiles and even a few tears appeared on the faces of some audience members.

The gentle ringing of bells, the rich notes of the pipe organ and the bold sounds of the orchestra brass quintet reverberated throughout the United States' first Catholic cathedral. Christmas compositions ranged from scores created 400 years ago to tunes written by modern musicians.

"On such a cool and wet wintry evening, isn't it wonderful to be in one of the most beautiful churches in the world, hearing such an array of music of the season," said Edward Polochick, artistic director of the Concert Artists of Baltimore, between musical arrangements.

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien joined the audience including patrons of the arts, volunteers of Catholic Charities' 80 programs and parishioners from various Catholic churches throughout the archdiocese.

St. Louis, Clarksville, parishioner Fred Lewis brought an entourage of Howard County friends, all of whom said the basilica venue created the proper mood to hear Christmas melodies.

"It's the first time I've been able to come to the basilica since it's been reopened, and to celebrate the Christmas season this way is just amazing," said Vicki Semanie, a parishioner of St. Margaret, Bel Air. "It's just breathtaking in here - more than I expected."