

Catholic Charities honors employees and volunteers

Hundreds of Marylanders gazed at the colorful Tibetan prayer flags that bedecked Baltimore's Renaissance Hotel for Catholic Charities annual dinner Jan. 19, celebrating the distinguished service of two of its employees, one of its volunteers and a school full of students who have provided the elderly with enthusiastic companionship.

Catholic Charities executive director Harold A. Smith told the guests who packed the ballroom the white, red, green, yellow and blue Tibetan prayer flags were synonymous with the altruistic service all of the award recipients bestow upon the needy in Maryland.

Just as the prayer flags "bless the air passing through them," Mr. Smith said the honorees "share their wisdom, compassion... and hard work with the community."

Thunderous applause greeted each honoree as they approached the podium to accept their award, which went to Edward D. Burger, Lynda Meade, Fronzie Williams and the students of The Seton Keough High School Baltimore.

Mr. Burger, a Baldwin resident and parishioner of St. John the Evangelist, Hydes, has volunteered his many decades of construction expertise with Catholic Charities' Building and Maintenance Committee for the past 12 years and served on the organization's board of trustees from 1995 to 2002.

Mary Rode, administrator for St. Vincent Center, Timonium, called Mr. Burger an extraordinary volunteer.

"Every construction and renovation project at Catholic Charities in the past several years has Ed's stamp on them," she said.

His guidance has been invaluable on renovation and construction projects that include Chara House, a community-based transitional foster care facility for medically fragile infants and toddlers; Caritas House, an assisted-living facility; St.

Vincent's Center, a residential facility for children with emotional or behavioral disabilities due to neglect or abuse; My Sister's Place, a day shelter for homeless women and their children; and Our Daily Bread Employment Center, the one-stop service center for the homeless that is scheduled to open in the spring, Ms Rode said.

"There are a lot of people in this room who do a lot of volunteer work for Catholic Charities," Mr. Burger said. "To be singled out is a real honor. The fact that what we are doing helps children and the needy makes all of us feel the weight of the responsibility in delivering the best job we possibly can."

In her job as director of social concerns and parish social ministry for the past 21 years, Lynda Meade - a Towson resident and parishioner of Cathedral of Mary Our Queen - has taken the Maryland General Assembly by storm for more than two decades and challenged the administrations of five governors to make aid for the state's most vulnerable a priority, Mr. Smith said.

The creation of a spectrum of affordable housing projects and initiatives to service low-income residents and seniors has been the achievement that Ms. Meade said has given her the most pride.

"This is a great honor, but I haven't been alone in advocating for the needy," she said. "We have a coalition of employees and people in the parishes. They have researched these issues and let their voices be heard in Annapolis. They find the policy makers and make it to the committee hearings. It takes a lot of people to make progress."

As director of Residential Services at Gallagher Services for the past 19 years, Fronzie Williams' efforts have fostered independence for people with developmental disabilities and transformed their living spaces into homes, said Mark Schulz, a coworker for the past decade.

Ms. Williams likened Gallagher Services to a train ride, saying in both you meet good people and looking out the window you see a myriad of possibilities for the future.

"This is what we do with the disabled people every day," the Westminster resident

said. "It's been quite an uplifting experience."

In receiving the Anne Lindsey Ostenasek Youth Service Award, the girls representing Seton Keough High School said their volunteer work with the residents of the Jenkins Senior Living Community - a Catholic Charities facility across the street from their campus - was a privilege, not a chore.

When the girls hosted the Seniors' Prom at their school last year, they were bowled over by the energy that some of the elderly men and woman had on the dance floor, said Lauren Riedy, 17, of Ellicott City and a parishioner of Resurrection, Ellicott City.

"I can still see this one woman really shaking it," the Seton Keough senior said.

"Working with them let's you know that getting older isn't scary. They make it look fun."