

Frederick County father honored for dedication to Catholic schools

FREDERICK - Public schools were not far from Bill Ballantyne's backyard, but all three of children graduated from St. John Regional Catholic School in Frederick and then St. John's Catholic Prep in Buckeystown.

Why would he pay to send them to Catholic schools?

"There's no cross hanging over every door (in secular schools)," he answered.

Ballantyne was honored Oct. 2 at Ceresville Mansion in Frederick as the 2018 John McElroy Award winner by the Friends of Catholic Education, an independent organization which provides scholarships and tuition assistance for Catholic schools in Frederick County.

The award, named for the priest who founded what is now St. John's Catholic Prep, recognized Ballantyne's dedication to Catholic education, especially at his children's schools, where he has served a combined 12 years on their respective boards; on more than six committees (chairing two); and as a coach and a referee.

He has hosted 23 auctions for the two schools. His "Patio Daddy-O" events, through themed cookouts, sporting event parties and pub crawls, have raised more than \$150,000 for both of the schools and for Cystic Fibrosis causes.

Prior to moving to Maryland, where he now is the vice president of operations at Best Plumbing Supplies, the laid-back Ballantyne taught various topics in the English and performing arts from 1981 to 1987 at the former La Salle Military Academy in Oakland, N.Y., an all-boys Catholic boarding school run by the Christian

Brothers.

“It’s a commitment to good education,” Ballantyne said of his dedication to Catholic schools.

The honor brought his older sister, Margaret Ballantyne – not to be confused with his daughter, Maggie, the advancement and communications specialist at St. John’s Catholic Prep – to Frederick from her home on Long Island, N.Y.

Ballantyne did not know his sister was coming, and she was thrilled to surprise him.

Margaret said their family was immersed in the faith community throughout their childhood. Their mother taught at Ss. Joachim and Anne School in Queens Village, N.Y., where the siblings received their primary education.

“That’s all been a very big part of why he does what he does,” Margaret said. “We grew up in a home that was very dedicated to Catholic education ... It was just part of our life.”

Since its founding in 1989, FOCE has provided more than \$5 million in financial assistance to schools and families.

“The parents that want to send their children to a Catholic school might not have that option,” said Bill Milani, president of FOCE’s Board of Trustees. “Our efforts make that option possible.”

The evening included an address by Dr. Donna Hargens, Ed.D., superintendent of Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and an invocation by Father John J. Streifel, associate pastor of St. John the Evangelist in Frederick and St. Joseph-on-Carrollton Manor in Buckeystown.

It included representatives from all Frederick County Catholic schools: Mother

Seton School in Emmitsburg, St. John Regional Catholic School in Frederick, St. Thomas More Academy in Middletown, St. John's Catholic Prep in Buckeystown and Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg.

There were also scholarship recipients, such as Julianna Gorsky, a fourth-grader at St. John Regional, who struggled to pick her favorite aspect of the school.

"It's really nice," Gorsky said. "It's hard because there are so many good things about it."

Jack Kosch, a seventh-grader at St. Thomas More, loves his school because it is welcoming, a place where attire and social status are irrelevant.

"It's a great school," Jack said. "It's really helped grow my faith."

His mother, Veronica, is the director of St. Thomas More. She and her husband, John - both products of Catholic schools in Washington, D.C. - knew before they had children that Catholic education was a priority.

"We felt very strongly that we wanted them to have that foundation for education and for life," she said.

Email Emily Rosenthal at erosenthal@CatholicReview.org