

School brings home Blue Ribbon celebration

As powerful religious, political and educational figures filled the packed Severna Park lobby of St. John the Evangelist Oct. 24, Conrad Reinheimer and Olivia Edwards realized the adjoining parish school they attend was no longer “just a school.”

Although the eighth-graders had known for several weeks their school had been named a United States Department of Education No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, they were beginning to realize the magnitude of that award.

“It means we’re a good school – not just an ordinary school,” Olivia said. “It’s an important school now.”

According to the Department of Education Web site, it seeks to honor “public and private elementary, middle and high schools that are either academically superior or that demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement to high levels.”

Former St. John the Evangelist pastor Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, the eastern vicar; U.S. Department of Education representative Ed Cashman; and several county and state government officials joined the entire school community to toast the award inside the church.

“It’s a big day,” Conrad said.

The school has been filled with a series of “big days” since the Sept. 9 announcement of the honor. Principal Sister Linda Larsen received the actual award in an Oct. 20-21 ceremony with the other 300-plus public and private school recipients in Washington D.C.

It wasn’t until the massive Oct. 24 celebration that she could make the honor resonate with the school community. Blue ribbons and balloons lined the hallways and entrances of the school and church as people milled about excitedly.

"It's overwhelming," Sister Linda said. "It's an overwhelming affirmation of what we've accomplished."

During the church ceremony, pastor Monsignor Richard W. Woy shared a conversation he had with Sister Linda, where she confessed the award was "probably the last big achievement of my life."

"I'm not sure that's true," Monsignor Woy told the school and its supporters. "What is true, Sister Linda, is we're here without a doubt because of your leadership and your dedication. There's no one who works harder and with more dedication than you do."

Bishop Rozanski, who helped pass out small blue ribbons to students as keepsakes, said it was "a joy and a privilege to be here for this historic and momentous occasion in the life of this school and the life of this parish. They should really take pride in being awarded the Blue Ribbon."