

# Shopping dollars work to reduce tuition

How can designing a teddy bear at Build-A-Bear, munching a cinnamon-topped soft pretzel at Auntie Anne's, or sleeping on a Ritz-Carlton pillow help parents reduce school tuition? Through SCRIP.

SCRIP (meaning substitute money) is a volunteer-run program in some archdiocese schools through which families sell retail gift cards to earn percentages off tuition bills. Gift cards – to hundreds of establishments – are offered at wholesale prices and sold to schools, who in turn, sell them at face value. Anything from groceries to electronics, toys to cosmetics, restaurants to department stores, even a Carnival cruise are available in a gift card.

At Sacred Heart School, Glyndon, a group of parents encompass the Sacred Heart Tuition Discounting Association (SHTDA) which has implemented SCRIP for over seven years. One top-selling family was able to shave up to \$1,400 a year from their tuition bill; another family reduced their tuition by \$1,200.

"They had a large family at Sacred Heart, so that really helped them," said Mary Lee McCusker, overseer of about 50 volunteers and the board for Sacred Heart's SCRIP program. She reports 4 percent of a family's total gift card purchases is credited toward their tuition.

SHTDA finds ways to get creative with SCRIP. By involving grandparents, friends and other people who can't use the program for themselves but can sell gift cards, they allow these sellers to file sales under a specified family's account. Earnings can also be donated to the school's General Tuition Assistance Fund.

SHTDA also keeps an inventory in stock of various gift cards in assorted denominations to make it convenient for families and parishioners to buy them for Giant, Food Lion, Santoni's, and other local grocery stores and businesses. Gift card sales are held after weekend masses and via the school.

"The local stores are big sellers," said the mother of two Sacred Heart students.

Currently 150 families participate (out of roughly 600). “Our marketing is getting better and better each year. It’s all about promoting the program in different ways.”

A “New Family” raffle is held for a month to attract more family participants. The winner receives a \$100 gift card to a local store.

About the overall program said Mrs. McCusker, “We’re really pleased with how it’s turned out.”