

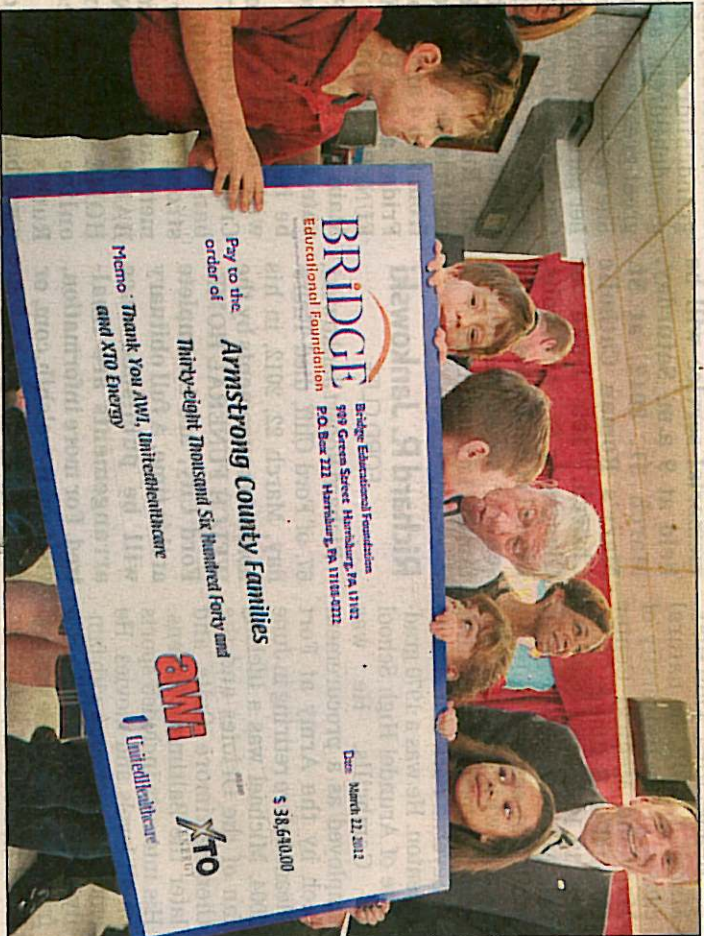


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State Sen. Don White, center and State Rep. Jeff Pyle, right, share a light moment with Divine Redeemer students, from left, Maddox Shafter, Anthony Reltano, Nathan Ferraro, Leia Wolfe and Myah Fullard as officials from across the state attended an event at the school to announce scholarship funding for eligible families in Armstrong County.

Scholarships offer choice

BY BRIGID BEATTY
LEADER TIMES

FORD CITY — A check, made out to Armstrong County Families, was so big — it took five students and a senator to hold it up following a scholarship announcement at The Divine Redeemer School on Thursday.

That check, for \$38,640, was the amount of scholarship money awarded to 45 income-eligible families with children enrolled in non-public schools.

The funding announcement was given by representatives from the Bridge Educational Foundation and its donors — Associated Wholesalers Inc. (which owns Sprankle's Neighborhood Supermarket in Kittanning and Elderton Country Market), as well as UnitedHealthcare

To learn more

Information on how to request scholarship funding can be found by clicking on the scholarship tab on www.bridgeedu.org.

and XTO Energy. The scholarship funds were made possible by those companies' participation in Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) Program.

According to Natalie Nutt, executive director of the Bridge Educational Foundation, the scholarship donations announced yesterday were part of the Pennsylvania Pre-Kindergarten and K-12 EITC Programs.

State Sen. Don White, R-Indiana, and State Rep.

Jeff Pyle, R-Ford City, attended the event to show their support for the program.

And because of those funds generated by the EITC program, many students, who are enrolled in either Divine Redeemer School or Grace Christian School in West Kittanning, can continue their education at those facilities.

White looked over the assembly of students, teachers and parents and said how much he enjoyed being there.

"Looking at these families does great things for my mood and my heart," said White.

"Parents deserve a choice where (their children) get an education. By providing these scholarships, educational opportunities are

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available to parents and their children that are otherwise unaffordable."

Before the presentation began, uniform-clad students filed to their seats in the school's auditorium and sang "America the Beautiful."

Principal Nicelena Carlesi welcomed the family members and officials who attended the event.

Joe Gerdes, of the Bridge Educational Foundation, told students: "We're here because we wanted to help. We ask that when you go home

tonight, hug your parents and say thank you. Thank your teachers and get good grades, so maybe one day you can pay it forward."

Gerdes thanked White and Pyle for keeping the EITC program going and said that Bridge Educational Foundation has raised more than \$15 million and has distributed scholarships to families across the state.

"This program is working, it's helping families throughout the commonwealth," he said.

Pyle noted that businesses get a tax break for participating in the EITC program.

"We try to grow the program," said Pyle, addressing the students. "What do you do to hold up your end of the deal? You go out and you get good grades. Make good grades. Obey God and mind your mom," he said.

According to Kelly Gerdes, Bridge Educational Foundation's director of scholarship programs, some of the eligible families are using scholarship money to finish the current school year, while some are holding off so they can use the money for next year's enrollment.

Crystal Emminger, principal of Grace Christian School,

said that close to 90 percent of families with students attending the school benefit from the scholarship funding.

Trent Boken, superintendent of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Greensburg, addressed the students and asked them to consider the meaning of the word, "priority."

"What's in the school is one of Bridge Educational Foundation's priorities, and that is — all of you," said Boken.

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