

U.S. Steel offers scholarship money for Catholic education

BY PATRICK CLOONAN

At Serra Catholic High School on Tuesday, U.S. Steel presented \$60,000 through Bridge Educational Foundation toward the first Allegheny County grants to be available under the state's new Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit program.

"In our uncertain economic times these scholarships make it possible for local families to choose the best educational options for their children," said Chris Masciantonio, U.S. Steel general manager for public policy and government affairs.

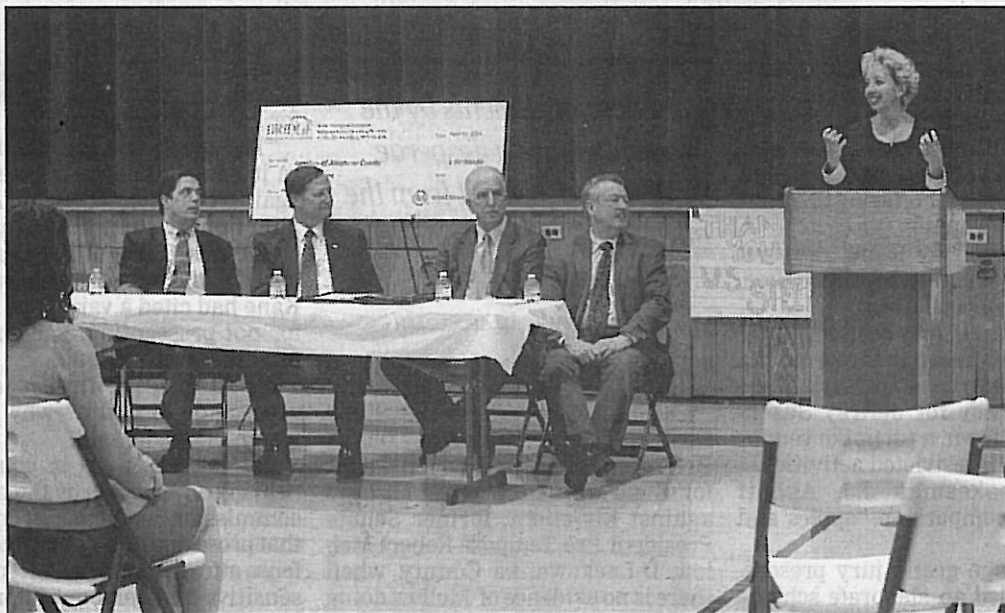
Beneficiaries of U.S. Steel's Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit gift include Serra and four Catholic elementary schools, East in Forest Hills, Mon Yough in White Oak, St. Agnes in West Mifflin and St. Therese in Munhall.

All qualify to take students from public schools deemed to be in the lowest 15 percent the target for the scholarships.

Locally, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the latest list includes all grades in Clairton and Duquesne, most McKeesport Area schools and Steel Valley's high school and Barrett Elementary School.

"U.S. Steel has been a participant in the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program from the very beginning," Bridge board member Jennifer Kessler told a gathering in the Serra gymnasium.

Like the new Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit program, the Educational Improvement Tax Credit allows companies to earn a tax credit of up to \$400,000 annually for providing tuition scholarships.



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Jennifer Kessler of the Bridge Educational Foundation hailed the support of government and business leaders at a Serra Catholic High School assembly, including, seated from left, Senate Minority Leader Jay Costa Jr. of Forest Hills, Rep. Bill Kortz of Dravosburg, U.S. Steel general manager of public policy and government affairs Chris Masciantonio and Sen. James Brewster of McKeesport.

"Your donations have touched the lives of many, past, present and future," Serra senior Sarah Schindler said.

"Without it, I would not be here," said Educational Improvement Tax Credit program recipient and Serra senior Jillian Vietmeier.

"It is largely due to this important program (that) this school is on a course of continued success," Serra principal Timothy Chirdon said.

Chirdon recalled his days as a guidance counselor and in admissions. He said the head-

master told him 90 admissions were needed, but 10 of those 90 were uncertain.

After an Educational Improvement Tax Credit gift, however, the headmaster told Chirdon, "Call those 10 families and tell them they will be able to attend."

Local state lawmakers who support both tax credit programs were in attendance at Serra on Tuesday, including Rep. Bill Kortz, D-Dravosburg, a Serra alumnus and former U.S. Steel manager, and Senate Minority Leader Jay Costa Jr., D-Forest Hills.

"We are always on a quest to make education better and more affordable," Sen. James Brewster, D-McKeesport, said. "We have a constitutional obligation to provide it."

Rep. Marc Gergely, D-White Oak, was called to Philadelphia and could not make it, organizers said.

"He is another strong advocate of this program," Kessler said.

Masciantonio introduced the lawmakers, citing Brewster, for instance, as "a strong leader and a strong advocate for the steel industry."

Mon Yough principal Lynda McFarland said U.S. Steel's gift helps families in a tradition started 2,000 years ago when Jesus told Peter, "Feed my lambs, tend my sheep."

She told the Serra students gathered in the gymnasium, "Some of you sitting there will be able to carry on the tradition."

More details about Bridge and the two tax credit programs are available at the www.bridgeitc.org website.

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