

SPICE

special people in catholic education



St. Catharine Parish

Spring 2013 Issue XII

The following story was featured in the Columbus Dispatch on Oct. 12, 2012. The Ryan family debated whether to allow this article to be featured in this newsletter. Their thought was that SPICE is not a story about Megan, but rather about awareness of Special Needs and what Catholic Schools can do to meet these needs. This story is a real tribute to the Catholic families of St. Catharine and Bishop Hartley Schools and epitomizes what can happen in an environment of awareness and inclusion.

Hartley seniors honor a favorite classmate at homecoming

For all 18 years of her life, Megan Ryan has given to others. Last night, her peers at Bishop Hartley High School returned some of the love. Ryan, who has Down Syndrome, was crowned the 2012 homecoming queen during a ceremony at the Roman Catholic school on the East Side. Her fellow seniors chose their outgoing, ever-smiling classmate from among 10 nominees. "I'm so thrilled for her," said senior Sam Burgess, a member of the court. "She just has a great personality. She's like a sister to me." The Hartley homecoming tradition includes nominee introductions, each girl escorted onstage by a guy. Ryan, escorted by Anthony Allwein, drew the biggest ovation. Still, hearing that she had won took her by surprise.



"I was in shock," Ryan said later. "I was super-excited, definitely." From the stands in the school gym last night, Bob and Mary Ginn Ryan watched their daughter beam — another moment of validation for the East Side couple. Megan is the youngest of their 11 children.

From the beginning, the Ryans set a tone, sitting their other kids down for a discussion just after Megan's birth. "They explained to us that she would have special needs," said son Phil Ryan, now 33. "I was in the eighth grade, and a lot of stuff was going through my head. But one thing they said was that they're called 'special' because they are, and they will brighten our lives more than we could ever realize."

Nothing has proved truer, Phil Ryan said. "Megan has always had that special twinkle in her eye that can win everyone over," he said. "She adds a sense of laughter to the room."

The Ryans' 10 older children — eight boys and two girls — all attended St. Catharine grade school. As Megan approached school age, her parents wanted only for her "to be able to do what her siblings have done," Mrs. Ryan said. They worried, though, that the Catholic schools couldn't provide the extra attention and resources Megan needs. "After a lot of agonizing, we just went in and talked to the principal at St. Catharine (Margaret Crabtree at the time)," said Mr. Ryan, co-owner of Egan-Ryan Funeral Home.

(Homecoming, continued on page 3)

Thanks for all of your support, prayers and for sharing our vision. SPICE has been bringing an awareness to St. Catharine and beyond for over ten years, and we thank you for putting SPICE in your life!

Bob & Mary Ginn Ryan, Co-Founders

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SPICE has lost a "Special" friend



Mr. George Wright passed away on September 13, 2012. Not only had George been a loyal supporter of SPICE from the beginning, George was a very "special" person and had a real understanding of Special Needs. Although George lived only a block from St. Catharine School, not many in the parish community

knew him. You see, due to complications from diabetes George was a double amputee and housebound. George lived by himself in his little ranch on Chesterfield Road. He was always impressed with the St. Catharine students he would see walking to and from St. Catharine School, and over the years it became a major part of his life. When he heard of SPICE, it all came together for George. He certainly had a personal understanding of Special Needs and the thought that St. Catharine had started a program to help meet the Special Needs of its students convinced him that St. Catharine was indeed a "Special" Place. To our surprise and pleasure, George remembered SPICE at St. Catharine in his will. George will always be in our memories. He touched the lives of many while amongst us. Through his generosity, he will continue to touch the many lives of St. Catharine Parishioners and Students through SPICE. Thank you George. Sláinte!

(Homecoming, continued from page 1)

"And she said, 'We've been waiting for you.'" So began 13 years of mainstream schooling for Megan, who occasionally is pulled out of class for one-on-one instruction. Before long, the Ryans said, they realized that other parents of special-needs kids might also prefer to send their kids to Catholic schools, which generally lack the resources and funding to meet the needs of such students.

To help such families, the Ryans in 1999 started SPICE (Special People in Catholic Education) at St. Catharine, working to raise awareness and funding. The program has since spread to 11 grade schools — eight in the Columbus diocese and one each in Dayton, Toledo and Kentucky.

Janet Weisner, principal at St. Catharine, said the program funded through private donations, gives out about \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year. The money pays for teacher training, student tutoring and other expenses. "It makes us a better community and makes us better teachers," Weisner said. "And for us, it answers the call when Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me.' It doesn't say just those children who are the brightest or the most athletic, but *all* children."

Mr. Ryan appreciates how his youngest child, through SPICE, has helped educate the larger community. "The taboo has been lifted and awareness raised," he said. "It's another example of, if it hadn't been for Megan, certainly none of it would have happened." He then recalled something Crabtree, the former St. Catharine principal, said on the day they first discussed Megan's enrollment there. "She said, 'Megan will give more to us than we ever will be able to give to her.'" Her words, he said, have echoed more clearly with each passing year. "I didn't get it at the time, but I get it now. It has been a wonderful journey for all of us." kgordon@dispatch.com



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ANNUAL ST. PATRICK DINNER BENEFITS SPICE

This year was another full house with plenty of great people, great food, and great entertainment! What a great night for SPICE, St. Catharine Parish, and everyone who attended! A “Hundred Thousand Thank You’s” go out to Jim and Peggy Mackessy for Chairing the event, to Chef Gary O’Allwein and his team of Leprechauns for all the delicious food and to the Committee Chairs and people who helped make this event another great night. “Cead Mile Failte”.

