

Rice Family Foundation gifts \$70,000 for Morning Star tuition assistance

Morning Star School, a Catholic school serving children in grades K-12 who have learning differences such as intellectual learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, processing deficits and high-functioning autism, received a \$70,000 grant from the Dianne T. and Charles E. Rice Family Foundation for tuition assistance this year. The donation comes on the heels of a \$50,000 grant from the nonprofit received by the school last year.

Thanks to the Dianne T. and Charles E. Rice Family Foundation's generosity for the past two years, tuition assistance is in good shape for this coming school year, however, looking ahead towards the needs of its families, the school has recently set up a Tuition Assistance Fund to allow more families the opportunity to attend the special education school.

Funds received from tuition, which is nearly \$12,000 a year, only cover the cost of school employees' salaries and benefits, said Maria Johnson, development director. "Everything else comes from fundraising," she said.

In addition, tuition only covers 80% of the actual cost of educating a single student. Florida's McKay Scholarships for Students



Charles Ray, Sharon Cascone Ray, Michael Cascone, Jr. visit what will soon become the Morning Star Life Skills Center

with Disabilities Program covers between 50% and 75% of the school tuition, and Florida Tax Credit Scholarships, administered by Step Up for Students, may provide free tuition to low income students who qualify, but in most cases they only cover 50% of the tuition costs, according to the school website.

"Each year, Morning Star School sets aside funds to help families who need financial assistance," said Johnson. "The money used to assist our families is taken from the previous year's fundraising initiatives. Unfortunately, these funds are never enough, and we are forced to turn many families away. Often, assistance is also needed during the year, due to extenuating circumstances

after the commitment to attend our school is made. These hardships may also include a death in the family, unexpected loss of employment, or serious or sudden illness with extraordinary medical expenses. Establishing a tuition assistance fund will allow more families the opportunity to attend our special education school," she said.

Two years ago, Morning Star received a lead gift of \$50,000 from the Michael, Jr. and Elizabeth Belyea Cascone Family Foundation to convert a single-family home, which lies next to the campus, into a Life Skills Center for Morning Star high-school aged students. This year, the school is seeking to raise an additional \$500,000 to renovate and equip the house into educational classrooms to help high school age students up to the age of 21 transition from school-age to adulthood. In the center, students will learn daily responsibilities such as food preparation, employment skills, technical skills, college opportunities and job preparedness. Also, part of the new program will be a focus on citizenship, self-determination and interpersonal skills to develop self-awareness, self-confidence, socially responsible behavior, independent decision making and communication skills.