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Presentation School Gala a smashing success

Thu Mar 20, 2008, 04:56 PM EDT

ALLSTON, MASS. -

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Correction: In an earlier version of this story, the last paragraph incorrectly attributed a quote that was actually said by Tim Garvin, who served as the auctioneer. Garvin is the President and CEO of the United Way of Central Massachusetts and a long-time supporter of PSF.

Last Friday, community members, politicians and parents gathered in the hundreds to celebrate a common dream — revitalizing the family community of Allston-Brighton, beginning in Oak Square.

“Too often, apathy and cynicism keep people home and disconnected,” said Tom O’Brien, president of the Presentation School Foundation, at Friday’s fundraising gala.

“The residents of Allston-Brighton have to take pride in their community,” he said, adding the community purchase of the former Our Lady of the Presentation School is a show of such efforts.

According to PSF Chairman Kevin Carragee, the gala held at the Royal Sonesta Hotel on March 14 raised approximately \$50,000, which will be used to begin renovating the building.

The Presentation School Foundation, a secular community nonprofit organization, announced its communion with WGBH, Wheelock College and Little Sprouts Child Enrichment Centers and will begin its Urban Early Education Initiative. The PSF’s first goal is to provide affordable preschool services to the community.

“Education needs us, and the time is now,” said Susan Leger Ferraro, president and founder of Little Sprouts. “We’ve been ignoring our little ones for too long.”

After 25 years, beginning at the age of 17, Leger Ferraro will open her eighth Little Sprouts location in the soon-to-be renovated Presentation School. WGBH has developed an early education program based on its television series “Between the Lions.” Combining the teacher training of Wheelock College with the child-enriching services of Little Sprouts, the Foundation School will act as a lab school for the new material.

“We’re going to pilot the new curriculum and will serve as a model for others to follow,” said Meghan McGinley-Crowe, executive director of literacy for Little Sprouts. She described the program as a sort of sequel to “Sesame Street” — “It’s like a field trip in the classroom.”

Future plans for the building will include adult and family community services, with linkages to local amenities such as the YMCA and the Faneuil Branch of the Boston Public Library.

Presentation Hill, as the Washington Street area is known, used to be bustling with families and children. It is widely believed that with the closing of the Presentation School, many elements of the community changed. The church population is getting older and is not being replaced, and neither is its revenue, said PSF Treasurer Neil Eustice. Without local schools, more and more children are going to private schools, making parents come under more economic stress, and then there’s less involvement in the community, he said.

One person who fought for PSF was Secretary of State William Galvin, who was honored at the gala for his dedication to the PSF.

“This was never about buildings,” he said. “It was never even about schools. What it’s about is a community, a community whose back was crushed. The courage of this group was able to repair, to some degree, this injustice.”

State Sen. Steve Tolman, D-Boston, and at At-Large City Councilor Stephen Murphy were also recognized for their involvement and contributions to the program.

Tim Garvin, who served as the auctioneer, was excited to be a part of this community grassroots effort, what is being referred to as the first community ownership of a community anchor. “Now we’re seeing the fruits of it come together, this is hope realized,” he said.

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