

## DONOR OF THE DAY

# Family Foots Tuition Bill for High-School Students

By Shelly Banjo  
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Six high school students who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford a Catholic education will begin classes Wednesday, for free.

Picking up the tuition bill is Claudia Gerbasi and Mark Ruggiere, who created a scholarship fund through New York's Inner-City Scholarship Fund in honor of their late husband and brother Bart Ruggiere, who was 32 years old when he died in the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks.

A trader at Cantor Fitzgerald and a product of Catholic education, Bart Ruggiere had donated to the Scholarship Fund but had never told his wife. After his death, Ms. Gerbasi found a receipt and she and Mark Ruggiere decided to form the Bart J. Ruggiere Memorial Fund, sponsoring a crop of new high school students, or what they now call "Bart's Scholars" every four years.

The Ruggiere family donates \$2,700 per student per year through the Inner-City Scholarship Fund, totaling

\$16,200 a year. The family also holds lunches with the students and principals and arranges summer internships for the students.



*Claudia Gerbasi*

The first six students graduated this spring from colleges such as St. John's University in Queens and Stony Brook University in Stony Brook, N.Y.

"At Bart's death there was such an outpouring of support, the family decided to start a foundation with the proceeds going to the Inner City Scholarship Fund," says Ms. Gerbasi, who has since remarried. "Now, watching these kids graduate college—it's amazing to think that something good could actually come from Bart being killed."

Average yearly tuition for Catholic education in inner-city schools can run about \$6,700 in high school and \$3,000 in elementary, says Susan George, executive director of the InnerCity Scholarship Fund.

Last year, the organization saw a 50% increase in requests for help with tuition, grants the fund gives to families that have been paying tuition but lost a job or incurred another financial emergency.

"It's definitely a sign of the times, the need is there," Ms. George says. "We could provide double the amount of scholarships than we already do, if we had the money."

The Inner-City Scholarship Fund supports more than 35,000 students, 90% of whom are minorities and 33% of whom are non-Catholic, in 104 Catholic schools in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island. About 99% of the fund's high school seniors graduate and 96% attend college.

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“The kids truly understand the magnitude of the scholarship money and connect the sacrifice Bart made with them being able to have this education,” Mark Ruggiere says. “We are able to keep Bart’s memory alive, while seeing results from our donations in the children who stay off the streets, stay in school and go off to college.”