

Addison Atanga, Jack and Eileen Connors, Honored at Seton Awards Ceremony



Addison Atanga, who has bested brain cancer, become a star student and embraced acting, sports, community service, and story writing, recently received the Jack and Eileen Connors Seton Scholarship. The eighth grader at Trinity Catholic Academy won this \$1,000 award due to an essay he wrote about his life and Catholic school experience.

Diagnosed with a brain tumor in January 2005, Addison underwent a first surgery that was a failure. "However, on July 25, 2007, I was operated on for the second time at Tufts New England Medical Center, but the difference was that the surgery was successful and the tumor in my head was finally removed," he said. In his essay, Addison thanks the nun - his school principal at the time - who referred him to her surgeon at Tufts; he also thanks 11 teachers at his school (then Sacred Heart Elementary School).

A member of Trinity Catholic Academy's first class - the school was created in 2007 - Addison praises the new school in his essay. "One of the things that [have] made Trinity Catholic Academy a special place to learn is the welcoming and enthusiastic learning environment," he said. Science, math, history, English Language Arts and religion are each singled out by Addison for what he has gained from them, as is the time he spends in school learning about computers, music and art. "I enjoy religion because I continue to learn about Jesus and God and what I can do to behave and act as a child of God," he wrote.

Playing Oz in a recent dramatic production of the "Wizard of Oz" was exciting, according to Addison. He also likes to watch and play football and basketball, draw comic book characters, and write short stories. (He is currently working on "The Legendary Monster of Arial.") Video games are an enjoyable outlet, he said, and the 13-year-old is considering a career as either a medical doctor or a movie star. "My goal is to work hard in whatever I do and to ensure that I never give up but be good as I can possibly be," he said in his essay.

Addison "is a fine young man whose challenges never get him down," said Jack Connors, a founding partner and chairman emeritus of Hill, Holiday, Connors, Cosmopolos. "The way he presses on with such grace and a sense of giving back should be an inspiration to us all." Addison and his mother, Regina Atanga, were guests of Jack and Eileen Connors at the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Awards ceremony held on Oct. 5 by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) in Washington, D.C. Jack and Eileen were honored with a 2009 Seton Award for their dedication to Catholic education.

Finalists for the Seton Scholar award at Trinity Catholic Academy included Robert Lewis, Veronica Martins and Leila Desouto. Each finalist later received a \$500 scholarship from an anonymous donor.



Joining Jack and Eileen Connors, and Addison Atanga and his mother at the Seton Awards gala was Cardinal Seán O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap., Secretary of Education/Superintendent of Schools Mary Grassa O'Neill, and Father William Leahy, S.J., president of Boston College. (BC is the alma mater of Jack and Eileen Connors. Jack is a trustee and former chairman of the board of the college; Eileen is co-chair of the advisory board of the Boston College Graduate School of Social Work.)

Various other Catholic education leaders from Greater

Boston were also present, including Associate Superintendent of Schools Jim Walsh, BC Lynch School of Education Dean Joseph O'Keefe, and Ursuline Academy President Rosann Whiting. (Eileen Connors is an alumnae of Ursuline.) Well-known supporters of Catholic education who came to the dinner included U.S. Interim Sen. Paul G. Kirk Jr. of Massachusetts and Victoria Reggie Kennedy, widow of the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.

Jack and Eileen Connors have dedicated their time and resources for many years to ensuring that Catholic schools grow and flourish in the Archdiocese of Boston. The couple chairs the Campaign for Catholic Schools, an initiative to raise \$90 million for Archdiocesan schools - and they are always available to assist Cardinal Seán, the Catholic Schools Office, and young students like Addison Atanga. As the Cardinal and Dr. Grassa O'Neill noted in a salute to Jack and Eileen: "Your outstanding commitment and support for our schools, students, teachers and administrators has made a genuine difference in countless lives and has enriched our community beyond measure."

By Catherine Walsh