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A SYMPHONY OF SCHOLARSHIPS

AREA STUDENTS
RECEIVE MURPH'S
GIFT OF MUSIC
SCHOLARSHIP

Pride and joy: Murph's Gift of Music scholarship recipients Kendal Beard (from left), 15; Claire Maloney, 12; Jordan Swierczynna, 16; Kirsten Crenshaw, 15; Robert Straits, 14; Nora McKirdie, 10; Lauren Davis, 15 and Alyssa Straits, 15, gather at Richards High School. The scholarships are awarded in honor of the late Michael Murphy.
MATTHEW GROTTO - SOUTHTOWNSTAR

MAN'S LOVE OF MUSIC LIVES ON IN STUDENTS

Callie Pieczara never got to meet Michael Murphy, but she has him to thank for her new violin.

The fifth-grader at St. Catherine of Alexandria School in Oak Lawn was part of the first crop of local students to win scholarships from the Michael J. Murphy Memorial Fund. Callie's scholarship is paying for private lessons and an instrument, which the 10-year-old's grandmother, Evelyn Spitzer, said she couldn't have afforded otherwise on her fixed income.

"She was tickled, and so was I," said Spitzer, who cares for Callie. "When she saw the violin they provided her with, she was ecstatic."

The Michael J. Murphy Scholarship Fund launched last year as a way to remember Murphy, a 31-year-old musician from Chicago's Mount Greenwood community who was killed in a hit-and-run car accident in June 2008. Murphy, a graduate of Oak Lawn's now-shuttered Polaris School for Individual Education, taught guitar lessons at The Music School in Oak Lawn and recorded several albums with his own band, Leave.

"Music was his life," said his mother, Mary Ann Murphy.

After her son's death, Mary Ann teamed up with her son's friends to start a scholarship in his honor. They hosted a fundraiser at 115 Bourbon Street last fall and raised \$60,000, giving them the seed money they needed to award the first round of scholarships this school year.

The scholarships provide private lessons in music or dance as well as any equipment the student needs, such as an instrument or dance shoes. The fund is aimed at students whose families typically



Music to their ears: Claire Maloney (clockwise, from left), Alyssa Straits, Kendal Beard, Jordan Swierczyna, Lauren Davis, Kirsten Crenshaw, Nora McKirdie and Robert Straits are the first recipients of the Murph's Gift of Music scholarships.

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couldn't afford the expense of private lessons, Murphy said. Any student from the area whose family income is \$50,000 or less can apply.

Eleven students from St. Catherine, Richards High School and Eisenhower High School in Blue Island snagged the first scholarships, giving them the chance to take lessons during the 2010-11 school year. Charles Martin, the band director at Richards, said it's rare to come across scholarship opportunities that are so generous.

"I've never seen anything like this," he said.

The award came at a crucial time for Richards sophomore Kirsten Crenshaw, whose father lost his job in April.

"I knew my violin lessons might have been one of the first things to go if I couldn't find a way to pay for them," she wrote in an essay about the scholarship recently.

The scholarship also made a huge difference in Mary Aleman's household budget. Aleman's daughter, 11-year-old Olivia, dances on Oak View Center's Independence Dance Team and takes a tap class there, and the money covered

those lessons and paid for both hip-hop and tap shoes.

"It's a big expense, so it's a very big help, especially a time like this when everything is going up except the paychecks," said Aleman, a Catholic school teacher.

The scholarship fund will start accepting applications in January for the next round of scholarship winners, and Mary Ann Murphy is starting to plan another benefit for fall of next year.

To apply for a scholarship or to support the fund, visit www.murphsgiftofmusic.org.