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Car dealer renews scholarship offer

But school principal rejects money after getting other gifts

By Sara Neufeld

Sun reporter

June 4, 2008

Reacting to public outrage, a Southeast Baltimore car dealer renewed its offer yesterday to give \$8,400 in college scholarships to four Patterson High School students, but the school's principal turned the money down.

Principal Laura D'Anna said she received dozens of phone calls and e-mails yesterday from people willing to donate money for student college scholarships. She said she will be able to give the four students twice what Castle Toyota/Scion had initially promised them and give money to some of their classmates as well.

The Sun reported yesterday that Castle had withdrawn its scholarship offer. The dealership's owner, Howard Castleman, was upset that D'Anna decided not to permit media to attend the school's senior farewell awards assembly where the scholarships were to be presented. The May 23 assembly took the tone of a memorial service after the school's longtime JROTC instructor died of a heart attack a few days earlier.

Marcia Castleman, wife of Howard Castleman, said her husband did not know the scholarships had already been promised to four students when he withdrew his offer and decided instead to give the money to the Community College of Baltimore County. As the dealership was bombarded with angry calls, she called the city school system yesterday to offer to give the money after all, but D'Anna declined.

Castle had initially promised four students \$2,100 each, the cost of one year's tuition at Baltimore City Community College, the school they plan to attend. D'Anna said last night that she hadn't had a chance yet to count up the donations the school received yesterday, but she said she will have more than enough to cover two years of tuition at the community college for the four students.

D'Anna said she will use additional money to create a scholarship fund in memory of Air Force Maj. Gerald Thomas, who died May 19 at age 61 and had worked for the school for 15 years. After reading the *Sun* article, Thomas' widow drove to the school yesterday to give D'Anna a contribution toward the scholarships.

"This is overwhelming," D'Anna said. "It's just wonderful. It just restores your faith in mankind. My school community is so happy. Everybody has been just so generous, and they have not asked for any publicity or acknowledgment."

City Council President Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake, who was initially scheduled to attend Patterson's senior farewell ceremony to acknowledge Castle's contribution, said yesterday that she had facilitated the donation of \$8,400 by J.P. Grant, president and CEO of Grant Capital Management in Columbia.

"I'm happy to be able to facilitate the award," Rawlings-Blake said. "It's not like [the students] were promised brownies. They were promised keys to their future."

Marcia Castleman said that Toyota requires its dealers to get publicity for donations. She said her husband has done a lot of charitable work and is "really a wonderful person."

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