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## Special Thanksgiving service in Spotswood pays tribute to fallen soldiers, veterans

By *GENE RACZ*  
*Staff Writer*

Luigi Marciante Sr. stepped to the lectern at the foot of the altar at Immaculate Conception R.C. Church and delivered a heartfelt thanks.

His son, Luigi Jr., was an Army corporal killed on duty in Iraq last year, and the father came to thank not only the family from the parish who established a scholarship fund in his son's name, but a legion of other well-wishers.

The pews were full yesterday morning during the church's special Thanksgiving Mass, which celebrated and honored the service of all veterans.

"My son was a simple boy, he enjoyed life, there was not a bad bone in his body," said Marciante. "He wanted to serve his country, and today our family is moved by this gesture from the Cary family, the community of Spotswood and the church.

"We did not expect such an honor in my son's memory."

The Carys, Joseph and Toniann, live in town and their neighbor is the son of the godparents of Luigi Marciante Jr. The Carys were moved to create the scholarship fund when they heard Luigi, 25, had been killed in action soon after the birth of his son. The native of Elizabeth was residing in Brick at the time and is survived by his wife, Stephanie, and son, Lorenzo, now 1 year old.

As part of the larger Thanksgiving theme at Immaculate Conception, all students from the church's school were given the name of a service member to be remembered in their daily prayers.

Msgr. Joseph Curry said the Thanksgiving Mass gave the church the ability to honor Marciante Jr. and his scholarship fund as well as reminding people that the parish has families with military veterans and families with soldiers who are still fighting.

"We decided to expand the Mass to include all veterans, it is an important thing for us not to forget them," said Curry. "Sometimes, like bricks and mortar, we don't see them or remember them, but they are risking their lives for us and the least we can do is pray for them, or send them a little note, or at least support their families.

"We need to let them know they're making a difference for us and stand by them."

Following the Mass, students from kindergarten through second grade put on a presentation in the school cafeteria in which they sang songs and read the names of current servicemen and women who are relatives of people in the school.

The Luigi Marciante Jr. scholarship will award \$5,000 every year to a graduating eighth-grader who has chosen to attend a Catholic high school.

"The scholarship is a very nice thing, especially for us, because it goes to Catholic education which is very important to many people," said eighth-grader Erica Guketlov,

president of the student council. "It was a very generous donation, and a great way to thank everyone who has served in wars fighting for our county and for what they believe in.

Guketlov also noted that the student council was able to collect over 1,500 cans of food for its Thanksgiving food drive, which were donated to a local food bank.

Also in attendance at yesterday's Mass were the parents of Army Specialist Michael L. Gonzalez of Spotswood, who was killed this past summer in Iraq.

Joseph Cary said the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, when he was working at J.P. Morgan on Wall Street, were a "turning point" in his life. He started the scholarship fund after discovering through his neighbor that Marciante had been killed.

"On 9/11, just observing the volunteers, the paid people sprinting in that building to help my colleagues and anyone else in distress, it just became ingrained in my head," said Cary. "We were just moved by the blind acts of courage where they risked their own lives to save people they didn't even know."

"I think doing the scholarship provides a way for people to be remembered who have given their lives for our country," added Cary. "This is something, unfortunately, that has happened a lot and I just don't want anyone to forget it."

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