

The BISON Scholarship Fund

Fifteen Year Update



The BISON Fund Mission

Founded in 1995, the BISON Scholarship Fund, Inc. is a privately funded tuition assistance program for economically disadvantaged children. BISON is based on the belief that a one-size-fits-all educational system is ineffective in providing for the needs of our diverse community.

BISON is designed to give low-income parents a full range of choices about their children's education. Families receiving a BISON award are able to enroll their child in a private elementary school of choice in the greater Buffalo area. Other than geographic restrictions, families must meet financial eligibility levels which help to determine the grant award.

Why grammar school? Early excellence lasts a lifetime! Tuition assistance and scholarships are traditionally reserved for the college level, but the early years are the most important of a child's education. A quality education can break the cycle of poverty, but scholarships to prestigious schools are of no help to children who are under-educated early in their academic careers. Children who are poor readers and deficient in math at the elementary level have little chance of realizing their potential. BISON believes every child should have the chance to succeed!

Giving Families a Choice ~ Giving Children a Chance

As the BISON Fund enters its 15th year of providing families a choice in educational options for their children, our first order of business is to thank the donors who have made these choices possible. In our first 14 years we have given over 14,000 awards to economically disadvantaged children who wish to attend a private grammar school, with an economic value of nearly \$10 million. BISON enjoys a very broad donor base, ranging from major foundation support to smaller gifts from many of Western New York's citizens. Be assured that our families are most grateful to you for making this educational opportunity available for their children.

We consider our supporters as investors in this endeavor and accordingly want to assure you that the investment you are making is paying off with positive results. Since BISON funds children in elementary school, we feel that the greatest measure of success is where these children go to high school after they graduate from 8th grade. We are pleased to report that approximately 55% of the 8th graders go on to private high schools of choice and about 30% enter one of the better performing public high schools. We are gratified by these results and are also tracking where the children go after high school as well.

BISON does not pay the entire tuition but partners with the family making private education possible. Families need to contribute at least \$500, which is a significant sacrifice as the average gross income of our families is approximately \$28,000 per year. These families understand the importance of education in giving their children a chance to break the cycle of poverty and provide hope for their futures.

BISON maintains a very lean administrative staff, with two full time employees who administer the nearly \$1.5 million scholarship program. In addition, our Annual Celebration Luncheon (the organization's only special event) continues to grow, with over 700 attending the event in 2008 and netting revenues of over \$120,000.

Please take a moment to read through this 15th year report and learn more about BISON's work. We would ask all our supporters to join us as ambassadors to further the mission and work of the BISON Fund in our community.

Again, THANK YOU for your support of these children and be assured that you are making a difference in their present lives and in their futures, giving them the opportunity to be responsible, productive citizens. In addition to strengthening families, we are helping to stabilize enrollments at private schools that provide a safe and academically sound environment in inner-city neighborhoods - increasing education options for everyone.

- Paul D. Bauer
- Anthony J. Baynes
- Thomas R. Beecher, Jr.
- J. Patrick Bohen
- Thomas J. Comer, Jr.
- Patricia A. Farrell
- Andrew L. Fors
- Christopher L. Jacobs
- Paul G. Joyce
- Carl J. Montante, Jr.
- Nancy A. Naples
- Mary E. Ross
- Richard C. Suchan
- Dennis J. Szymkowiak

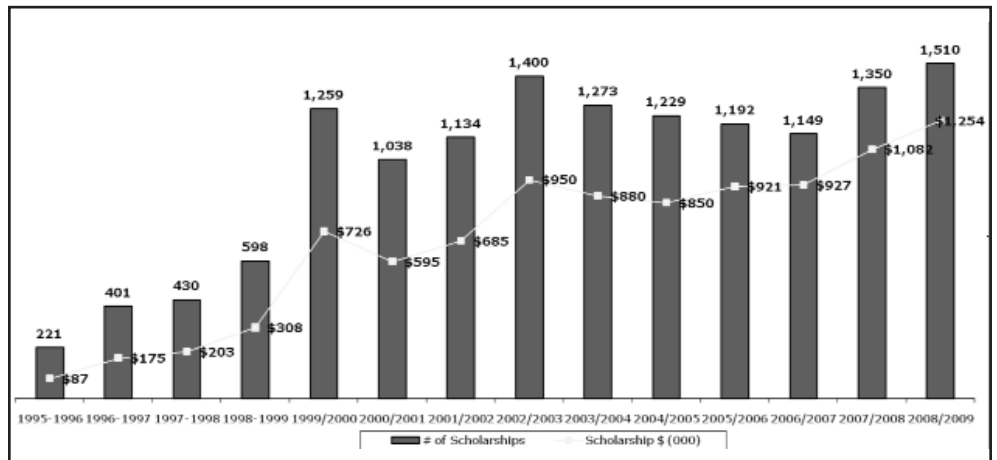
Executive Director

Kathleen M. Christy

Program Director

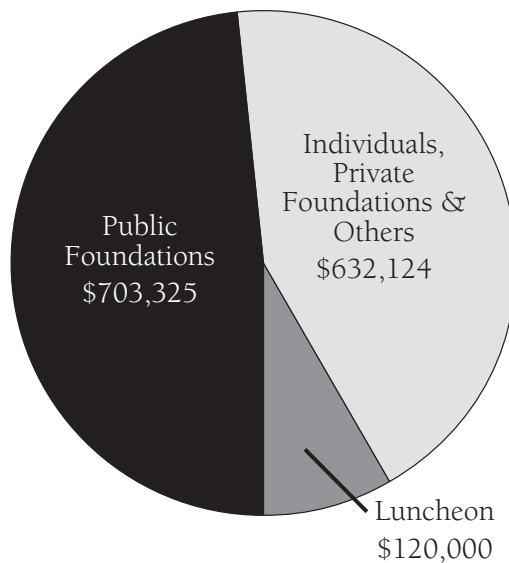
Cynthia L. McDonald

Highlights of Our History



- We started with 221 awards and have grown to 1,510
- First year cost was \$87,000; current year is \$1,254,949
- Of the \$10 million raised in 15 years, \$5.5 million is from personal donations from Western New York citizens; \$3 million from Children's Scholarship Fund of New York City and the balance from another public foundation.

SOURCE OF REVENUES 2008-2009



BISON EXPENSES 2008-2009



• Public Foundations	\$703,325
• Individuals, Private Foundations & Others	\$632,124
• Luncheon	\$120,000
TOTAL:	<u>\$1,455,449</u>

• Scholarship Costs	\$1,254,949
• Administration	<u>\$200,500</u>
1) 100% of donations go to scholarships	
2) Administration is paid by specific donations and event sponsorships.	
TOTAL:	<u>\$1,455,449</u>



What Our Students Have to Say

The greatest measure of success for BISON is the many wonderful stories of how children have been positively impacted by enrolling in the private school of their choice, and several children have been the main speaker at our Annual Luncheon. The following are excerpts from two speeches of former BISON students:

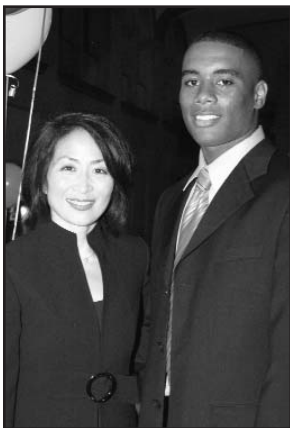


FROM THE 2006 LUNCHEON:

Good afternoon. My name is Marli Lee-McGarrah. I began attending Catholic Academy of West Buffalo in 1999 when I was in 3rd grade. After completing 3rd and 4th grade at Catholic Academy, I then switched to Buffalo Traditional for 5th grade. My mom, being a single parent with two children could not afford to pay for both my sister and I to continue at a private school. Luckily, when I was in 6th grade my sister and I transferred back to Catholic Academy because our family won BISON Fund scholarships. My sister graduated in 2003 and I once more transferred to the Enterprise Charter School for the 7th grade. After being there for a very short time, I realized that I wanted to go back to Catholic Academy. I took it upon myself to call the BISON Fund office where I spoke to Mrs. McDonald about my scholarship. When she said that it wasn't too late and that I could go back to private school, I was overjoyed and so thankful! Over those few years I had transferred around from school to school and was so glad to finally have some stability in a school that I loved. When I graduated from 8th grade I was fortunate to receive an Oishei scholarship for the Buffalo Seminary.

I am so grateful and thankful for the BISON Fund. I strongly believe that I am in a better place because of the opportunity it gave me to receive a good education. Without it, I know I would not be standing in front of you today. I don't know where I would be. So thank you BISON Fund and all of the people that donate to give us scholarships to go to schools of our choice. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity you've given me.

Marli graduated from Buffalo Seminary in 2009. She will attend Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon.



FROM THE 2007 LUNCHEON:

Good afternoon BISON donors, guests and fellow students. My name is Justin Young and I am proud to be able to stand here before you as a senior at Canisius High School. My ability to become a successful student who partakes in community service, while excelling on both the football field and basketball court as a captain on both teams is in large part due to many of the people who sit here before me. Without the help from the BISON Fund I would not have attended a private grammar school with a more rigorous curriculum and higher standards than that of the public school in my area of the City. Without support from the BISON Fund I probably would not be a student at Canisius or a recipient of the Oishei Scholarship. I thank God for the people who run BISON and more importantly the donors who give the money that allows lower income families, who normally would not be able to send their kids to private schools, have the chance to receive the best education available.

As a Canisius student I have learned to become a multi-dimensional student who manages school and extra-curricular activities. I am not just the captain of the varsity basketball team and football team, but a member of the National Honor Society, a Student Senator, a Big Brother and work on community service projects. I have taken advantage to the best of my abilities of the great opportunities The BISON Fund has helped to kick-start for me. All of the goals I have set in place are very attainable if I stay determined and continue to live my life as a man for others who puts God first above everything.

Justin graduated in 2008. He received a full scholarship to Colgate University and had a very successful freshman year.

Who is eligible for a BISON Scholarship?

- Eligibility for consideration of a BISON Scholarship Fund award include: residing in the city of Buffalo or Lackawanna, Cheektowaga, West Seneca, Amherst (14226), Kenmore and Tonawanda.
- Families who have children entering Kindergarten through the 8th grade, and meet financial eligibility requirements (the scale is based on percent of poverty).
- Each year, applications for new BISON families are available from October through the end of April.
- For more information about the program, feel free to contact us or visit our website at www.bisonfund.com.



Make A Donation

Our demand for tuition assistance is very strong and we continually need to raise funds to make these awards possible! Please join us in helping to make a difference in the lives of so many children in our community. You can start by underwriting one child at \$800 for a year. Or, if possible, consider underwriting two children. Your support is greatly appreciated! Education is everything!

Consider BISON in Your Will

Education is the gift of a lifetime. Consider making a bequest of needed scholarship assistance in your will or estate plan to The BISON Scholarship Fund, Inc. Contact BISON or your attorney, accountant or financial advisor for more information and assistance.



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