

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES:

## A bridge to those in need

By Gene Fulkness  
Editor

Those who want to serve the working poor may have to go the place where they spend most of their waking hour: at work.

That's what staff members from Catholic Charities of Idaho are doing to help meet the needs of some of the 2,700 Idahoans it served during the last year, said Doug Allen, executive director of CCI, speaking to about 350 guests attending the agency's annual benefit gala on Feb. 29.

CCI's new "Bridge to Work" program dispatches Catholic Charities workers who provide counseling, immigration legal services, education skill building, advocacy and mentoring sometimes from the comfort of their offices to those places where "life really happens," Allen said.

Some employers, like Idaho Youth Ranch, allow Catholic Charities to come to the job site and meet clients to assess needs and offer assistance. Jean Credit Union brings its staff to offer innovative financial services to workers who struggle living paycheck-to-paycheck, Allen said.

"So many times we get stuck in the stigma of labels, believing that people who are poor must be lazy, using drugs or just wanting the government to support them," said Wendy Lahmon, who directs another Catholic Charities program called "Pathways to Progress."

"However, the majority of people we serve fall into the category of the working poor, where they are working long days, at multiple jobs, yet still unable to meet their daily living expenses," she said.

Too often, we forget that many of the poor come from families who have been poor for generations, Lahmon said. He mentioned Tony, a middle-aged man whose childhood was filled with neglect and the trauma that comes from homelessness and uncertainty about a next meal. "He felt very lonely and was ashamed from being judged and misunderstood at a time when he just wanted to belong and to believe that there is more to life than this."

By the time workers at Catholic Charities met Tony, he had been working at the Idaho Youth Ranch for 10 years, but still struggled financially. CCI workers got to know Tony by visiting his job site, assessing his strengths and talents. They encouraged him to set small goals, like giving up his daily energy drink, which was expensive and not healthy, and buying a fruit or vegetable instead. The personal satisfaction he got from achieving that one goal led to other more substantial goals. Now Tony is thriving, Lahmon said. Not only is he more financially secure, he is in a position to where he is now saving



Speakers at the 13th annual Catholic Charities of Idaho Gala Benefit included, from left, CCI Executive Director Doug Allen, Wendy Lahmon, Pathways to Progress' director, and Jennifer Palagi, chair of the CCI Board of Directors. (Courtesy photos/Chris Neigand)



From left, Chris Christensen, CCI immigration attorney; Martha Alvarez, immigration specialist; Consuel Ricardo Gerardo Figueroa of the Mexican Consulate; Cynthia Striban, manager of the CCI immigration team; Marica Muñoz, immigration specialist; and Claudia Lisette Espinosa Ramos, Legal Affairs, Mexican Consulate. (ICR photo/Veri Gutierrez)

*"So many times we get stuck in the stigma of labels, believing that people who are poor must be lazy, using drugs or just wanting the government to support them."*

— Wendy Lahmon  
Catholic Charities of Idaho

toward fulfilling a lifelong dream: attending an NBA game.

Jennifer Palagi, chair of CCI's board of directors, told those attending the benefit that the agency just completed its 20th year of service, increased its counseling service hours by 32 percent, including opening a counseling ministry at Boise State University.

Palagi said CCI now offers counseling and immigration services using technology, allowing it to serve rural Idaho. It also began providing visa services for religious workers, helping to facilitate the arrival of new foreign-born priests in the Diocese of Boise.

The benefit raised about \$127,600 before expenses, according to CCI communications director Donna



From left, Visenta Alvarez, Claudia Lisette Espinosa Ramos, Doug Allen, Alma Lut Barboza Escamote, spouse of Consuel Ricardo Gerardo Figueroa who is pictured at far right. (ICR photo/Veri Gutierrez)

Malone. Again, this year Father Bruno Segotta painted white guests socialized and heard speeches. Then his painting, an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary offering bread, was auctioned, drawing a high bid of about \$4,200.

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ply. Advocate Sponsors were Grubo Cooperatives and Saint Alphonse Health System. Partner Sponsors were Boise Housing Corporation, Capital Law Group PLLC, Clifton, Larson Allen, Cloverdale Funeral Home, Idaho Central Credit Union and the Idaho Dismen's Association.



Father Bruno Segatta of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in McCall, paints while visiting with James Harrison at the Catholic Charities of Idaho benefit. (Courtesy photo/Chris Melgaard)



Mike Kennedy, left, with CCI Executive Director Doug Alles. Kennedy is a member of CCI's Board of Directors and was the emcee for the benefit. (Courtesy photo/Chris Melgaard)



Father Bruno Segatta puts some finishing touches on his painting, which netted \$4,200 for Catholic Charities. (ICR photo/Vero Gutierrez)



Tim Schrag, left, is with Laura Alvarez Schrag, a CCI Board Member, and Father Germán Osorio-Hernández, also a board member. Father Germán, pastor at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Mountain Home, offered a prayer and short meditation at CCI's annual benefit gala. (ICR photo/Vero Gutierrez)



Some of the 330 attendees at Catholic Charities of Idaho's annual benefit gala danced to music by the JoyRide Band. (Courtesy photo/Chris Melgaard)