

Hundreds attend benefit for ailing Shrewsbury church organist



Michael Palumbo (bottom, center) and his family gather for a family portrait at the event. (Photo/courtesy Palumbo family)

By Bonnie Adams, Managing Editor

Shrewsbury – For 47 years, Michael Palumbo has served as the faithful organist for St. Anne’s Church. Now, at age 66, he has had to step aside from the activity that he loves so much as he faces a major health battle – Mike needs a heart transplant. As expected, the medical expenses associated with his illness are extensive.

But Mike is not facing this battle alone – emotionally or financially. On Sunday, Jan. 13, nearly 700 friends and fellow parishioners gathered at St. Anne’s for a benefit to help his family with the costs.

Mike was feeling well enough to attend the fundraiser. As he surveyed the scene in the parish hall and greeted a steady stream of friends who came to wish him well, he said one thing was constantly on his mind.

“To quote Lou Gehrig, ‘I am the luckiest man in the world,’” he said. “This is incredible; it means so much to my family.”

Mike grew up in Worcester but moved to Shrewsbury after he and his wife married 42 years ago. He served on the town’s call Fire Department and also participated in the Worcester Fire Brigade, where he played bagpipes.

“Doesn’t everyone want to play the bagpipes?” he joked.

But two months ago his illness forced him to step down as the St. Anne’s organist and lay aside his pipes.

Dr. Stephen M. Pezzella of the Reliant Medical Group is not only Mike’s personal cardiologist; he is also a lifelong friend.

“Mike’s been ill for a long, long time,” Pezzella said. “Over the last year, things became critical. He now has an artificial left ventricular device which is a bridge towards a heart transplant.”

Mike is considered a “1A” candidate for a new heart, Pezzella added, which means he is at the top of the transplant list.

During the fundraiser food was provided by Kevin Mercadante, Napoli Italian Deli and the Mastro Family. Dozens of friends donated door and raffle prizes, silent auction items and baked goods. Others, including Tammy Mastro, worked on the ticket committee.

“He is so well-liked and so respected,” she said. “When we heard about his situation, we came up with the idea of this fundraiser. “So many people wanted to help.”

Mike’s son Brendan, noted that his family was thankful to all those who had helped to put together the fundraiser.

“We had a great turn out,” Brendan said after the event. “The money will definitely help alleviate some of the stress for my parents to pay off some of these medical expenses that are not covered by health insurance.”

Those wishing to donate to a fund for Mike may do so in two ways. Checks may be made out to “The Michael Palumbo Benefit” and mailed to St. Anne’s Parish, 130 Boston Turnpike, Shrewsbury, MA 01545, attention Father Foley. A PayPal account, under the name PalumboJosephJ@gmail.com has also been set up.



Michael Palumbo (l) and his friend and personal cardiologist, Dr. Stephen M. Pezzella (r) of the Reliant Medical Group (Photo/Bonnie Adams)