

# Major Lutheran Elementary School Association Fundraiser is Cancelled

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ST. LOUIS - The St. Louis-based Lutheran Elementary School Association today announced the cancellation of a major annual fundraiser that provides critical financial assistance to children and families of all faiths in St. Louis and southern Illinois. (Click [here](#) for links to our Illinois schools.)

LESA's 16th Annual Cooking for Kids Tribute Dinner-Auction had been scheduled for Saturday, April 18, at Orlando's South. Tony Pietoso, founder and owner of Cafe Napoli

in Clayton, and a Lutheran North alumnus, was set to headline the dinner. Pietoso, who spent time in a Lutheran orphanage in Italy before immigrating to St. Louis as a teenager, had designed a special menu for the event. The evening would also have included the presentation of LESA's 2020 Lutheran Student Christian Leader Award to 13-year old Ella Arbeiter, a graduating eighth-grader at Green Park Lutheran School in south St. Louis County who plans to attend Lutheran South in the fall. This fundraiser also benefits Zion, Belleville and Zion, Bethalto.

The cancellation comes at a time when requests for aid are increasing, said Sue Nahmensen, LESA's Chief Executive Officer. Nahmensen said staff members are working on converting the event to a virtual fundraiser to ensure students get the help they need to stay in the schools they love.

"The job loss and financial hardships resulting from this pandemic will have a deep and devastating effect on the children we serve," said Nahmensen. "We need to do everything we can to make sure those families and the schools that rely on us can continue to do so in the future."

Located in south St. Louis County, LESA administers need-based scholarships for 31 Lutheran elementary schools through its Building Blocks Scholarship Program. For the current 2019-20 school year, LESA awarded \$454,701 in assistance to 477 children. Currently, 1 out of 10 Lutheran school students receives some level of need-based assistance from LESA.

More than 8,300 children of all faiths attend LESA member Lutheran schools in the St. Louis Metro Area, making Lutheran schools the second-largest private school system in the Bi-State Region. A Recognized Service Organization of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, LESA represents 31 elementary schools, three high schools and three related agencies. Since 2004, LESA has awarded more than \$5.5 million in need-based scholarships to 3,488 families in the St. Louis area. For more information, visit [www.LESAstl.org](http://www.LESAstl.org).