

BEST COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP

A FULL HOUSE



GEORGE WIDMAN/AP FILE PHOTO

Former Phillies catcher Darren Daulton played for 17 years and has a World Series ring. He, Tommy John, Bud Harrelson, Jim Eisenreich and others will be in Bethlehem this weekend to show their support for the BEST College Scholarship Organization.

Former Phillies, Yankees set to visit the Sands to lend a hand in sending lucky kids to college

BY KEITH GROLLER
Of The Morning Call

A long list of former Yankees, Phillies, Mets, football Giants and other sports personalities will be at the Sands Casino on Sunday night, including very familiar names like Tommy John, Darren Daulton, Bud Harrelson and Jim Eisenreich.

They will sign autographs, mingle with guests and even tell some stories.

But perhaps the true stars of the event will be three young people you may have

never heard of.

They are Maria Lopez, Katie Rivera and Edwin Leon, and they epitomize what the BEST College Scholarship organization is all about.

All of the sports stars will be on hand for the BEST Scholarship reception at the Sands, which will be followed by the BEST celebrity golf tournament on Monday at the Bethlehem Golf Club.

BEST, in this case, stands for "Building Education Support Teams," and the organization is a 501c3 non-profit organiza-

tion dedicated to "finding students in need of financial assistance to fulfill their dreams and goals of obtaining a college education."

Lopez, Rivera and Leon are three graduates from the program, getting a chance to get a college education they once thought was impossible.

Billy Staples, a Bushkill Township resident and former Bethlehem Area School District teacher, is a co-founder of

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the program.

Staples, who is also a motivational speaker, has written several books about sports, including "Before the Glory" and "Billyball 2009," and has gotten to know a large number of pro athletes, even going back to his childhood days when he was a fixture in the Yankees clubhouse.

So, these events for the BEST scholarship program combine two of his loves — meeting sports personalities and helping kids who need a chance.

"I may have retired as a teacher, but I am still in a classroom every day somewhere in this country talking about things like self-respect, goals, having optimism, giving effort and having a sense of accountability," Staples said. "And those are the kinds of things this program is all about."

"This is a scholarship program for kids who didn't finish in the top 50 percent of their class. There's no money for them. They're not getting noticed. In fact, they didn't take their SATs because they didn't know college was an option for them. As a teacher, I saw these kids all of the time, but I would see potential in them. I felt like I was doing a disservice to them by just saying 'Good luck' as they walked out the door."

Judy Tierney co-founded the BEST program with Staples and she deeply believes in its mission.

"I devote a tremendous amount of my life to this organization because of the passion I have to give back," she said. "I don't have to do it, and I don't get paid to do it and I don't need to do it. I do it because I want to. It is my drive and passion. I do whatever is necessary to make sure the current and future students we have in our program achieve success."

Tierney said that since the program began a few years ago, 60 students from New Jersey and the Lehigh Valley have been assisted and 11 students have graduated. In a calendar year, Tierney said, more than \$20,000 in scholarships are awarded.

In many cases, the students have a considerable number of hardships and obstacles to overcome. Staples said that a few of the students have even been homeless.

And yet, all three of the speakers at Sunday night's reception graduated from college on time.

"We have a motto of 'One Step At A Time' and with help and support they have, and are, achieving success, accomplishments and their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families," Tierney said.

"We've gotten tremendous support from leaders in the community like Joe Brake [general manager of Coca-Cola of the Lehigh Valley] and Linny Fowler [a well-known area humanitarian and artist] and

ON THE RADIO

Tommy John and Billy Staples will be among the guests on Saturday's "Calling All Sports" radio show on AM 1470, the Fox, and online at fox1470.com. John and Staples will be on between 10-11 a.m.

we reach out to the corporate world for support and in turn they get first dibs on our graduates," Staples said. "When our kids graduate, we ask they come back and live in the community for at least two years."

Staples said that he has always loved underdogs and the kids being helped fit that description.

"I like beating the odds and the odds are stacked against so many of these kids," Staples said. "When they go on and graduate, it's like an underdog has pulled off a big upset. It's exciting."

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Judy Tierney, co-founder of the BEST program

The list of sports personalities and celebrities who will be at the Sands on Sunday night and playing in Monday's golf tournament include:

Ottis Anderson, Stephen Baker, Bo Orlando, Gary Collins, Jesse Barfield, Mike Bielecki, Steve Braun, Marty Byström, Fred Cambria, Rick Cerone, Ralph Citarella, Doug Clemens, Daulton, Rich Delucia, Al Downing, Eisenreich, Jack Fisher, Dick Gernert, Buddy Gilbert, Jim "Mudcat" Grant, Harrelson, John, Jack Lazorko, Ken Macha, Art Mahaffey, Ross Moschitto, Katharyn Nicolle, Dickie Noles, Steve Rogers, Al Santorini, Duke Sims, Tracy Stallard, Frank Tepedino, Milt Thompson, Jim Weaver and Bobby Wine.