

## Over 400 turn out to celebrate Grade 2 student Laura



**By Brock Weir**

From far away in Texas, seven-year-old Laura can be assured she has a friend in her entire school community.

Over 400 people from the St. Joseph Catholic School community, and beyond, filled The Mansion on Thursday night for a Benefit For Laura, raising funds for a little girl from the Aurora school currently undergoing therapy for an inoperable brain tumour in the United States.

Organized by parents over just a few short weeks, the benefit brought together artists from around York Region, assistance from Aurora companies and service groups, and a very mobilized community of faith to support her and her family as they travel this difficult journey.

"They wished they could be here today," said St. Joseph principal Christine DeHaas. "Today, she had an MRI and knowing that this was going on helped them get through those tough times. In this type of support they find comfort knowing people have given from their hearts and to support them, their family and Laura."

Knowing that their classmate is sick, they pray for her every day and when the opportunity came, her fellow Grade 2 students took to the stage for a moving rendition of You've Got a Friend in Me.

"Laura is a very good friend of mine," classmate Hailey told the crowd. "I have known her since I was three years old. We played together at our Polish school on Saturdays and I remember our trip to Disney. It was so much fun because Laura is very funny. She was always making silly faces when she didn't want to listen to her parents."

"One day my sister, Olivia, and I were supposed to have a playdate with Laura and we got very sad when our mom told us our playdate was cancelled because Laura got very sick and she had to go to Houston with her parents. We miss Laura a lot and even though she is so far away, we think about her every day. We pray for her and wish she will get better soon. Laura is a strong girl and we believe she will come back to us, to her home, and to our school and everything will be like before. We love you, Laura."

Thursday's benefit had everyone, young and old, up on their feet with music to appeal to the whole family, from the upbeat music of the Wet Bandits and With The Lights Off, to the classic standards voiced by Vaughan's Angelica di Castro, to the rap stylings of Michael Rosa of Bolton. One special request, however, was fulfilled by St. Maximilian Kolbe student Brayden Ellis, who leant her voice to a special rendition of Skyscraper.

"The lyrics of Skyscraper are very good and they mean something to me as well," said Brayden, a Grade 12 student. "When I am

singing, it really means something to me and I think it will mean a lot to Laura too because they are very strong lyrics and they are coming from the heart.?

In addition to Brayden, students from St. Max with upcoming graduates donating nearly \$600 to the cause, firm in their conviction that Laura will follow in their footsteps as part of the class of 2024.

?Look around,? said Father Joseph Gorman of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church. ?So often people say, ?Where is our faith in this time of need?' When we look at these pictures, we often ask what can we do? Today you are doing it. So often people ask what we can do for Laura and her family and this is it. With your vision, you have made this possible. The community of Aurora has made this possible and her classmates make this possible.?

Near the end of the evening, Ms. DeHaas shared her amazement at how the benefit had come together and indeed how so much of the Aurora community rallied around one little girl and her family.

?I know it was a great success and it was a real community event,? she said. ?I am so happy for the family because I think in some small way it has got to be supportive.

?I had one little girl come up to me and say, ?Will Laura be coming back?' I said, ?We hope and pray she will come back and will be in your classroom, singing songs and speaking French.' The kids are scared. Although they are having a great time, they have asked such deep questions and are just trying to make sense of it all, that they are doing this for their friend and she is not here.?

For updates and further ways to help the family, visit [www.savinglaura.com](http://www.savinglaura.com).