

**NATALIE PIANOFORTE  
FIRST PLACE WINNER**

BENSONHURST — Natalie Pianoforte knew the fact that she sold 83 subscriptions to The Tablet would put her in good stead in the fundraiser.

But she had no idea she won the contest until John Alexander, the marketing and circulation manager, walked into her classroom at St. Athanasius Catholic Academy holding a giant check with her name on it.

"I was amazed," Natalie recalled after accepting the giant check (she would later be given a real one) in front of her classmates at the Bensonhurst school on June 13.

Natalie quickly recovered from her shock and talked about her plans for spending her windfall. "I'm going to spend it on my tuition and buy my (school) uniforms," she revealed.

What's the secret to her success? "My family just bought from me because they wanted me to win," she said, modestly.

Natalie, who will be a fourth grader in September, had a special cheerleader in her corner: her older sister Noelle. A sixth grader at St. As., Noelle won the contest last year after selling 48 subscriptions. "I'm really happy because I wanted her to win. Because when I won, she was happy for me. So now that she won, I'm really happy for her," Noelle said.

As Natalie sees it, she and sister are tied after winning one apiece. That's given her an added incentive. "So now I want to win again next year," she said.

With the school year ending, Natalie is looking forward to summer vacation. In September, she will start the fourth grade. Her favorite subjects are math and reading. She loves playing with her friends at recess. Outside of school, she enjoys playing video games like Fortnite and Minecraft.

As she took part in the contest, Natalie was inspired by Msgr. David Cassato, who recently announced his retirement as pastor of St. Athanasius Church. "I wanted to sell them for Msgr. because I knew he was leaving," she explained.



## Big Checks for Winners in the 2022 Tablet Covid Relief Fundraiser

by Paula Katinas & John Alexander

into students' pockets and schools' coffers. But while this year's fundraising tally was impressive, it was just a little more than half of what was earned last year, when more schools from the diocese participated.

This year only 32 out of 68 schools (less than half) accounted for all the subscriptions sold.

Additionally, while The Tablet opened up the fundraiser to high schools, none of those schools in the diocese chose to participate.

Vito Formica, Executive Director of News and Content Development for The Tablet, feels it was a missed opportunity for many of the schools who chose not to support the campaign.

"There were also big cheers at St. Athanasius Catholic Academy in Bensonhurst, St. Nicholas of Tolentine in Jamaica and St. Francis de Sales in Bell Harbor when the Tablet's John Alexander showed up with checks for grand prize winner Natalie Pianoforte (St. Athanasius), second place winner Leila Rose Sison (St. Nicholas of Tolentine) and third place finisher Leo Benedetto (St. Francis de Sales).

Natalie, who sold 83 subscriptions, was awarded the grand prize of \$3,000, for all of her efforts.

Leila Rose won \$2,000 for selling 33 subscriptions and Leo received \$1,000 after he sold 24 subscriptions.

The subscriptions sold during the month-long campaign resulted in more than \$17,000 going back

participants in this year's fundraiser, and I look forward to even more of our participation and our involvement next year," said incoming Diocese of Brooklyn Superintendent of Schools Deacon Kevin McCormack.

"The idea of cooperating with The Tablet is that it works for us. It tells our story. It tells the story of the diocese and the great work that's being done. Here's a situation where we can help ourselves by helping The Tablet get more people to read about all the great things that are happening in our diocese," he said.

"I look forward to working with everybody at The Tablet and DeSales Media, because together we can get the good news out to all."

For each \$20 subscription a student sold, they received \$10 (three orders were required to qualify), and their school received \$5. The funds were earmarked to help cover the costs of tuition and the hardships schools have experienced due to the unexpected expenses associated with COVID guidelines.

"So first I'd like to congratulate all those who

participated in this year's fundraiser, and I look forward to even more of our participation and our involvement next year," said incoming Diocese of Brooklyn Superintendent of Schools Deacon Kevin McCormack.

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"The fundraising is critical for the schools, for The Tablet, for everything," Msgr. Cassato said. "What better way to get Catholic information into people's lives than through The Tablet?"

**The Pro-Life Newspaper**

**LEILA ROSE SISON  
SECOND PLACE WINNER**

JAMAICA — Leila Rose Sison is graduating from St. Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic Academy in Jamaica this month and will start high school at The Mary Louis Academy in September. She will already have money put aside for her tuition even before classes begin.

That's because Leila, an eighth grader, won second place in The Tablet's Covid Relief Fundraiser for Catholic School by selling 33 subscriptions. She knows what she will do with her \$2,000 prize. "I am going to be using it for tuition at my high school," she revealed.

Leila admitted that she got help in her quest to sell subscriptions. "My mom basically just helped me. She reached out to all of my family and all my friends," she said.

Being a salesperson is harder than it looks, she said. "And we are kind of limited because of Covid," she said.

Just as she knows what she will do with her winnings, Leila also has her future mapped out. "I want to go to college to become a doctor or a nurse. There are a lot of people in the health field in my family," she said.

Her favorite subject in school is English. Outside of class, she enjoys sports like swimming and volleyball.

Her advice for students planning to take part in next year's Tablet fundraiser? "It's hard to sell newspapers but it can be done. Ask your friends and family and see if they know anyone you could sell to," she advised.

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**LEO BENEDETTO  
THIRD PLACE WINNER**

BELLE HARBOR — Leo Benedetto hasn't decided what to do with the \$1,000 he won for his third place finish, but he won't be spending it on himself. "It'll probably buy some things for the house to help my mom out," he said.

Leo, a third grader, said he enjoyed becoming a salesperson — so much so that he might consider doing it as a career in the future. "It's hard but it's a lot of fun," he added.

The key to selling newspaper subscriptions, he said, is persistence. "Don't really give up, even if you don't start off good. You have to just keep trying and you can succeed," he advised.

He loves attending St. Francis de Sales, where his favorite subject is math.

Outside of school, Leo is a big sports fan who loves basketball, baseball and soccer.

His favorite baseball team is the New York Mets, and he's happy they're having a great season so far. "They're in first place!" he noted.

In basketball, he roots for the Los Angeles Lakers and the Boston Celtics but confessed that he also likes the Golden State Warriors.



**Leo Benedetto**  
One Thousand and 00/100

