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## Singer and auction raise money for Heartland Lutheran

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“Hope is a beautiful thing.”

Country music singer Kevin Sharp said hope — along with the love and faith of family and friends — is what kept him alive through a grueling two-year battle with a rare bone cancer.

He shared his inspirational personal struggles and his songs Sunday night as the featured speaker at Heartland Lutheran High School’s annual Red and Blue banquet and auction.

That same tool — hope — is what prompted a die-hard group of Heartland Lutheran High School students to successfully launch a 77-hour-7-minute-7-second basketball game at the school last spring. The game not only secured the school in the Guinness Book of World Records, but raised more than \$77,700 for the nine-year-old school’s financially-struggling coffers.

“Heartland Lutheran is here to stay,” said basketball coach and now Heartland Lutheran Development Director Lloyd Wagnitz.

The energy of the school and the community came together in a powerful way a year ago and it continues on.

That same energy was flowing Sunday night as 60 of the 66-member student body worked a 400-plus person crowd to, as Wagnitz said, “invest in the future of Heartland Lutheran ... where faith and education meet.”

The very basketball court where history was made a year ago was stage to white-linen-draped banquet tables dressed with burgundy napkins and mirrored centerpieces.

Students in white dress shirts and black pants served Windsor pork loin and cherry sauce before bussing away the plates just before Sharp’s heartfelt address.

Sharp was just 18 when agonizing exhaustion finally led to a diagnosis of Ewing’s Sarcoma — a bone cancer that doctors believed would end Sharp’s life in just six months.

He was angry about the diagnosis, but after battling through chemotherapy, radiation, hair loss and a debilitated body, he seemingly had beat the unbeatable.

Then came the real struggle — the ensuing depression of realizing he wasn’t going to die, but rather had to live in a body and with a mind that was not the Kevin Sharp he grew up knowing.

Finally, Sharp said he “mourned the death” of the Kevin Sharp he once knew and assessed what he had “gained” in the process.

“This guy was better than the last one,” he said of his reassessment of himself.



Singer, speaker and spokesman Kevin Sharp speaks at the 2009 Red and Blue Auction at Heartland Lutheran High School. Jon Helgason/For the Independent

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The once "Make A Wish" recipient hit it big in the music industry. He was named the New Male Vocalist of the year by the Academy of Country Music, the New Touring Artist of the Year by the Country Music Association and the Favorite New Country Artist by the American Music Awards.

He had a string of chart toppers such as "Nobody Knows," "She's Sure Taking it Well," and "If You Love Somebody," which the Heartland crowd helped him sing Sunday.

Five copies of his newly released book "Tragedy's Gift," sold at prices between \$100 and \$175 during Sunday's night's auction. He autographed the books, as well as a guitar donated by Ron's Music that sold at the auction.

"We hope and expect to raise \$100,000 at this year's banquet/auction," said school board Chairman Rev. Daniel Bremer. "Your kindness and generosity will help make that dream come true."

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