

McDonnell helping raise cash for Petersburg school
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By **JUAN ANTONIO LIZAMA**

PETERSBURG -- Attorney General Bob McDonnell donated \$1,000 toward St. Joseph School's \$1 million fundraising goal during a tour yesterday morning.

When he read about the Petersburg school's financial troubles, he decided to visit the school hoping to get other people involved, he said.

He had gotten \$2,500 in pledges from his office staff, and a \$20,000 pledge from Dominion Virginia Power's President Thomas F. Farrell II yesterday morning, McDonnell said. "His check is almost in the mail."

McDonnell, who graduated from Bishop Ireton Catholic High School in Alexandria, said the visit brought back memories. He told St. Joseph's principal, Ruth Bonner, that the school is doing a terrific job.

"We would like to see 133 years more," he told her as they stood in front of the 1916 building. A yellow banner hangs from the entrance stating the amount the school must raise -- \$1 million -- and the deadline -- next Monday.

Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo has asked the kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school to come up with \$1 million to cover a half-million-dollar deficit, next year's budget and improvements to the building and academic program.

Some people might ask why the bishop has asked for so much in so little time, said Annette Z. Parsons, the diocese's superintendent of Catholic schools.

"He is not interested in a Band-Aid," she said. "He is interested in a long-term sustenance."

McDonnell visited with teachers and students, who were eager to share what they like about the school and why they don't want it to close.

Joshua Coover, 7, told McDonnell that he and his sister had gone out to their neighborhood one day and raised \$400 for the school, which he likes "because it's nice . . . and it's very cool."

McDonnell also stopped by Beth Knight's science and social study middle school class and talked to the students.

"You keep on working hard," McDonnell told Knight as he left the classroom. "We'll try to raise a little money for you and keep students coming next year."