

## ***United Way refocuses on lifting families out of poverty***

### **Annual fund drive launched with \$1 million goal**

**By SANDY SCARMACK**

*Herald Staff Writer*

HERMITAGE – Lifting families out of poverty would be a breeze if every worker in Mercer County gave just \$1 a week to the United Way, said the agency's Executive Director Jim Micsky as he launched the 2016-17 campaign drive Thursday.

With 50,000 workers across the county, a dollar a week would bring in \$2.5 million in a year, and the amount of good that could be done would be "unbelievable," Micsky said.

Though it sounds simple, raising that kind of money is difficult, and the United Way Board of Directors has set a goal of \$1 million to raise in the next 144 working days. That's \$200,000 more than the 2016 unmet goal of \$800,000. They were about 15 percent shy in meeting that goal, bringing in about \$680,000, he said.

---

For the last year the United Way has been working on an initiative to raise families out of poverty and, for the first time, are tying recipients' allocations to programs that can prove they lift families out of poverty by using measurable objectives. Micsky said they are strongly encouraging agencies to work together.

"We have to maximize our resources as much as possible," he said.

The United Way is using a three-pronged approach to tackling poverty, focusing on education, income and health, Micsky said:

- Only 35.9 percent of school-aged children participated in a publicly funded, high-quality, early education program in the last year. The United Way's Success by Six program helps develop socialization and learning skills during a six-week summer program. This year, 325 students participated.
- For the income part of equation, area bankers taught a financial literacy class at the Prince of Peace center in Farrell. It was a "huge success," Micsky said. Participants learned 11 basics of money management and household finances.
- For the health piece, Mercer County ranks 47 out of 67 when it comes to health outcomes. The health behavior index ranks the county as 64 out of 67, an indicator, Micsky said, "that we need to think differently about how we live our lives. We are working with nonprofits to make sure everyone has access to health care, wellness programs and responsive social services."

"It takes everyone in the community working together to create a brighter future, many hands to make the load lighter," said Mark Ferrara, United Way of Mercer County board chairman.

The campaign officially ends March 31, 2017, and the money is distributed to 26 social service agencies and organizations in

April.

FOR MORE INFORMATION or to make a tax-deductible contribution go to [www.uwmercercounty.org](http://www.uwmercercounty.org) or call 724981-1884. The United Way office is at 493 S. Hermitage Road, Hermitage.