

United Way outlines programs, 2016 campaign goals

By **HOLLY PATTERSON**
hpatterson@recordargusnews.com

HERMITAGE —

When it was introduced last year, the United Way's initiative "Lifting Families Out of Poverty" set out to help as many Mercer County families as possible.

And now, a year later, the group continues its efforts and

hopes to expand its services, which include financial literacy programs for

adults; vision and dental screenings for children; and an integrated computer system for partnering agencies.

Jim Micsky, executive director of the United Way of Mercer County, said the efforts and allocations from 2015, which were collected through the first quarter of 2016, are the best investment in the Mercer County community each year.

"We live in communities that care, and through these efforts, we can improve the quality of life for those

who live in our community, who are served by the United Way," he said. "The Lifting Families Out of Poverty initiative is more than just a bold goal ... it is a new way of doing business."

United Way Planning Chair Sharon Sorg, who helped introduce the initiative a year ago, said that through the efforts, three new programs — Primary Health Network Charitable Foundation, Community Hometown Rentals and the unified database of service agencies funded by the United Way — have partnered with the United Way to better provide services to residents in need.

Through the Primary Health Network, Sorg said that program is aimed at providing transportation to and from appointments for those who use their medical services.

Meanwhile, Community Hometown Rentals, an effort started by Jarrett Whalen, provides safe and affordable housing for families, and the United Way's unified database for the service agencies provides accurate and shared information between agencies to reduce duplication

of services. It also creates a sense of responsibilities for clients to be sure the most accurate information is in the database.

Also during the United Way's annual meeting Wednesday, Hope Couch, the PA 211 Southwest chair, spoke about the 211 central calling service, which provides clients or potential clients access to resource navigators, most of which is accessible 24/7, of some of the 232 total service agencies available.

Couch said between July 2015 and June 2016, a total of 3,319 calls were tracked from the Mercer County area to Pa 211 Southwest, including the highest number of referrals to the Prince of Peace Center in Farrell, but also LIHEAP and crisis utility assistance, the Community Action Partnership for Neighbor to Neighbor Heat Fund, as well as the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs at various locations throughout the county.

Additionally, Nicole Billak, the Mercer County Success by 6 project manager, offered an update on services through the six-week early childhood education initiative, which has grown to serve 17 classrooms in 13 Mercer County school districts, including the recent addition of Jamestown Area School District.

Billak said through comprehensive testing and observation, marked improvement for children who attend the Success by 6 program is shown in areas of social skills, as well as fine motor skills, which sets them up for better success during the school year.

"Of the Success by 6 program, this is huge to give kids a head start to success," Billak said of the program that receives \$87,000 in allocated funding.

While it is difficult to solicit funds, Bob Piccirilli, who serves as the 2016 campaign chair, said, "Our goal, our mission is to reach \$1 million. We can make a difference in peoples lives."



Micsky

