

OP

## OUR VIEW

## 'Pay it Forward' by donating to United Way

**T**HERE'S a national program you might have heard of or have taken part in: "Pay it Forward."

It's a wonderful idea. A person picks up the check for a stranger in a restaurant, pays for someone else in their line at the grocery store, or makes some other anonymous charitable contribution.

The hope is that the spirit of the gift will be carried on, and the people who benefit from the gesture will do the same for someone else.

In a way, the 2016-17 campaign motto of the United Way of Mercer County - "Lifting Families Out of Poverty" - is the same idea.

Those of us who are doing well and whose lives have been blessed can offer a helping hand to someone who is facing some sort of challenge. Call it payback. Call it a hand up. Whatever you choose, the bottom line is simple: When you give a person a chance to improve his or her life, you give a gift of the opportunity to change his or her future. And the best part is, you could help a family at the same time.

And the hope is, of course, that they will do the same for someone else when they get back on their feet.

United Way Executive Director Jim Micsky announced the launch of this year's fundraising efforts with a lofty goal of \$1 million to aid the needy. We say lofty because last year's goal of \$800,000 fell short.

But with a dedicated group of volunteers and board members, Micsky feels the goal is attainable. And he says, the money it will raise is not only much-needed, but will make a difference in the lives of many of our friends and neighbors.

The United Way program encompasses three areas: education, income and health.

**Education.** The very successful Success by Six effort has been in effect for many years and helps young children develop social and learning skills during a six-week summer program that prepares them for their journey into public-school education. Studies show that if students get off to a good start, they have a much better chance of succeeding throughout their school years.

**Income.** In helping families learn to handle their income properly, area bankers have been teaching a financial literacy class that has already shown benefits for several local families.

**Health.** The local organization is working with nonprofit agencies to provide families with health and wellness programs and social services.

A total of 26 agencies receive funding through the United

## YOU CAN HELP

To make a tax-deductible contribution visit [www.uwmercercounty.org](http://www.uwmercercounty.org) or call 724-981-1884. The United Way office is located at 493 S. Hermitage Road, Hermitage.

Way, and the key is offering programs that fit the local theme of lifting families out of poverty.

So you see, it really is, a hand up, not a hand out.

The fundraising event that usually marks the official start of the annual campaign - the Restaurant Revue - is set this year for Sept. 22 at Avalon Golf and Country Club at Bul Park. It is a wonderful social affair and a sure-fire good time - with plenty of good food - for anyone who attends. Mark it on your calendar.

But the main focus and the real help for lifting families out of poverty comes in the form of donations from local business and individuals. Think of it this way: If every worker in Mercer County donated just a dollar a week, almost \$2.5 million would be raised. A dollar a week is not much, not really. If we each eliminated one coffee once a week, we would go a long way toward raising enough to help make a real difference for a family or an individual in need. And if we ate out one less time per month, we could give a child the tools he or she needs to get a good start toward an education.

And here's something else to think about, too. If we give these families the chance to get themselves out of poverty and to take that first step, they are one step closer to being able to stand on their own two feet which is ultimately what anyone wants.

We realize that everyone has bills to pay and must support their own families. But even small donations help. And those who donate can take pride in saying they are "paying it forward" so that maybe someday today's needy will become tomorrow's donors to the United Way and other charities.

And if you help the United Way reach its goal, we'll join with the many volunteers and say: "Thanks a million!"