

The Pennsylvania AFL-CIO 56th Annual Community Services Institute

Daily News



July 22-25, 2015

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RENAISSANCE HOTEL, ALLENTOWN, PA

PENNSYLVANIA AFL-CIO

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Community Services Institute 2015

By Gregg Potter

The third largest city in the Commonwealth has undergone a dramatic facelift with over \$1 billion in new construction with plans for a billion more over the next couple of years. Part of this resurgence is the Renaissance Hotel, the home of the 2015 CSI. This beautiful facility is wrapped around the brand new PPL Arena which is also home to a Lehigh Valley Health Network office as well as some Air Products employees. All of the construction work has been done by members of the building trades unions, which provided a significant economic stimulus to the Lehigh Valley. A time lapse video showed the progress of the two year project and condensed it into a two minute brief which was impressive. (The video can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeNnu29Xj54>)

President Bloomingdale began the event with his remarks congratulating the delegates on the work that they have done since we last met. Over 80 delegates registered, many of them enjoying their first institute. Father Jack O'Malley, a CSI

mainstay, provided the invocation and got the program off on the right foot.

Chairman David Fillman applauded everyone for their efforts and recognized the many members from Pa. who performed various community service projects. Sometimes you have to take look back and see what has been accomplished and with the union members in PA the work has been significant.

Everyone enjoyed the reception held on the balcony of the PPL Arena that overlooks the center of Allentown at 7th & Hamilton Streets.



Opening day session - Top row: Keynote Speaker, Chairman David Fillman, Executive Director of AFSCME Council 13; Richard Bloomingdale, President of PA AFL-CIO. Bottom Row: Father Jack O'Malley; Gregg Potter, President of Lehigh Valley CLC

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Jim Deegan said: “The Community Service Institute celebrates the AFL-CIO/United Way partnership and focuses on ways to nurture and strengthen that partnership for years to come.”

The AFL-CIO/United Way Partnership

By Jim Deegan, PA AFL-CIO Editor/Comms. Director

Friday, July 24th, was designated as AFL-CIO/United Way Day at the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO Community Services Institute. President Bloomingdale opened the emotionally moving General Session by discussing the importance of the partnership between the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO and United Way throughout the state. There are 14 United Way partnerships, making Pennsylvania one of the most extensive networks in the nation.

“Our partnership is by far the best approach for all of us to meet the needs and challenges. Together we can combine our resources and efforts to help families and communities. When disaster hits we don’t ask people to see only their own union – we help anyone and everyone who needs assistance, both union and non-union,” President Bloomingdale said.

President Bloomingdale also asked all of us to take advantage of every opportunity to tell the public about the many good deeds we achieve through our community service programs.

“This is not for self-promotion or headline grabbing, but rather to educate people and families about the resources and programs that are available when the need arises. The side benefits will be helping to grow our union and building our stature in our communities.”

President Bloomingdale then introduced Marci Ronald, the Executive Vice President of the United Way of Greater Lehigh Valley, stating that the partnership with the Lehigh Valley is a great example of what can be accomplished when we come together to help each other.

Ms. Ronald thanked the delegates for their efforts and dedication in supporting community services at every level and highlighted the list of four initiatives underway in the Lehigh Valley to help working families. These include support and resources for early childhood programs, food assistance for low income families that no longer qualify for SNAP, affordable childcare for working parents, early childhood learning to boost education achievement, and advocacy and support for living wages for working people. Our next speaker, Kristen Rotz, the new President of the United Way of Pennsylvania, thanked President Bloomingdale and Secretary-Treasurer Snyder, as well as the labor movement, for supporting her organization’s initiatives and efforts.

Ms. Rotz highlighted several initiatives currently underway to help the 52 local United Ways throughout Pennsylvania achieve their goals. At this time, the United Way of Pennsylvania is building an advocacy campaign on legislative and public policy issues, involving local United Ways across Pennsylvania. Under her leadership, the United Way of Pennsylvania is focusing on key public issues which address income stability, education, and utilizing new technologies to expand the work of individual donors.

Health Workshop

By Sandra Moosic, Labor Liaison UW of Wyoming Valley

Health is one of the building blocks to a quality life, identified by United Way with goals of improving access to healthcare and encouraging health behaviors for all ages. Fifty-five percent of United Ways across the country report that access to healthcare was their most common focus area. Today’s delegates were provided with comprehensive information on Medicaid expansion and eligibility requirements, as well as how to navigate the Healthcare Insurance Marketplace.

Libby Lurwick from the PA Health Access Network and Tom McHugh from the Advocacy Alliance did a fantastic job simplifying the process and providing resources for delegates to take back to their members and communities.

Education Workshop

By Jim Irwin

Nicole Fuller, United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey labor liaison, spoke about the United Way's Early Childhood Education Program and the importance of early childhood education. She discussed the vulnerability of children starting school one to two years intellectually behind other children and that nearly half of all kindergartners start school with a reading deficit. Children who cannot read by third grade are unlikely to graduate from high school, and 25% of high school students fail to graduate on time. Nicole also stated that 67% of fourth graders cannot read at their grade level, and more than 20% of today's workforce is functionally illiterate. She went over ways to help children in the community such as by being a mentor, reading to children, and helping them with school work – just showing up and checking on children in the community lets kids know that someone cares.

Sean Crimmins, AFL-CIO Community Services North East Regional Director, went over the First Book Program. Books are 50% to 90% off and are available for children ages 0-18 years old. This program is available for schools and also provides school supplies. You can contact First Book Program at www.FirstBook.org/join, Help@FirstBook.org, or 1-866-READ NOW (1-866-732-3669).

Mickey Sgro, AFSCME District Council 83 Director, spoke about the importance of the Little Free Library program in communities (littlefreelibrary.org). Everyone in the community is able to use the library – you simply take a book and replace it with another. Children in the community get a chance to read more books, and it encourages them to also use public libraries. Through social media, there is always a way to get books if the library runs low on books. A Little Library is easy to build and in its most basic form can be a box full of books. Mickey went on to discuss how successful the program is in getting books to children who really need them.

Programs such as the First Book Program and the Little Free Library will help address the needs of vulnerable children and enable them to catch up with their peers in reading literacy.

Each year, more than half a million students participate in the National History Day contest. Students choose historical topics related to a theme and conduct extensive primary and secondary research. The students present their work in original papers, websites, exhibits, performances and documentaries. These products are entered into competitions at local, state and national levels where they are evaluated by professional historians and educators.

The winning entry that was seen on Friday, July 24th, took 4th place at the state level competition held at Millersville University on May 12th and 13th! It is entitled "Mother Jones Fights for Fairness" and the two young ladies performing are Megan Forst and Anjini Patel.

Income Workshop

By Karen Overly Smith, Labor Liaison UW of the Capital Region

Institute attendees joined Karen Overly Smith, workshop facilitator, to review current initiatives for improving working families' economic stability. Alan Jennings, Community Action Commission of Lehigh Valley, discussed labor members' need for advocating to nonprofits for intentional permitted lobbying action for human service issues. Deliberate, concerted public policy efforts are undermining working class and middle class families. Non-profit executives and board members need to get mad and get active. Policy needs changed so that fewer resources and less remedial efforts are needed to provide the growing safety net services.

Jennifer Hilt, Economic Stability Program Coordinator United Way of the Capital Region, reviewed opportunity to bring back money to communities through Earned Income Tax Credits collected through a VITA free tax preparation. Labor members can promote this service. Labor can volunteer as trained tax preparers or as greeters at the tax preparation site.

Ron Oliver, labor liaison Erie/Crawford County United Way and Alan Vandersloot, labor liaison York/Adams County United Way, provided updates on United Way initiatives focused on economic support provided to maintain and improve the quality of life for low to moderate income families.





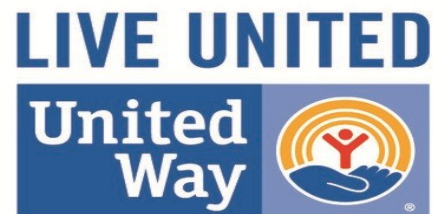
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