



SHARON — From left, David George, Jessie Hull and Nancy Lukasko accept the United Way of Mercer County Volunteer Service Award from UW board chairperson Richard Epstein. George and Hull accepted on behalf of Joe and Ruthanne George.

Scott DeJulia/R-A

Living United

United Way honors Anderson, Greenville Metals

By **SCOTT DeJULIA**
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SHARON — Lots of new faces will be in place for the next few years as the United Way of Mercer County held its 35th annual meeting Thursday afternoon at the Avalon at Buhl.

One of the major changes in the coming UW campaign would be the involvement of the Mercer County school districts, as well as Brookfield, Ohio. Outgoing campaign chairperson Frank Evans said that 11 of the county's school superintendents would share the duties he and his wife, Linda, have overseen in the last two years. Mark Ferrara, superintendent at Sharpsville, and John Sarandrea, Sharon super, were on hand to accept the mantle of leadership on behalf of the supers and the Mercer County Career Center.

For the second consecutive year, the Campaign Excellence Award went to Anderson Coach & Travel. Evans introduced the award winners, and a brief DVD was shown highlighting some of the things Anderson does, and what they've done to support the United Way, including increasing giving by 46.2 percent over the previous year.

In the presentation, president Doug Anderson said of the more than 200 employees at the company, more than 60 were involved with UW, even though some didn't live in Mercer County. Anderson had been a part of the Success By 6 campaign, which encouraged preschool programs designed to prepare kids to learn, and supported Reynolds and Linesville school districts for

Speakers explain importance of United Way to county

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SHARON — Income, health and education are three foci the United Way of Mercer County uses to gauge how it can best serve the community. At Thursday's 35th annual meeting, held at the Avalon at Buhl, three speakers talked about what UW does to improve each aspect in the county.

Major Stan Senak of the Salvation Army knew hard times. He said he was grateful the state passed a budget in time to keep things going at SA, but the United Way was there to provide assistance in 2009, when the Pennsylvania budget had stalled.

Senak told about two fathers who'd recently received help from Salvation Army. He said the fathers were committed to valuing

SPEAKERS

Continued from page 1

had to "pay" for the assistance.

Levels of assistance had stabilized from 2009 to 2010, Senak said, and the church had started a program to provide a source of protein to growing families in need with the United Way's help.

Joellen Arenas of the YMCA said the success they've been having belongs to everyone, including the United Way. Arenas and her team is currently managing recreation in Greenville.

According to statistics Arenas quoted, 80 percent of YMCA members lived within five minutes of the building they used, and most people won't drive more than 15 minutes for recreational services. Adult obesity rates had gone up in 28 states in the past year, she said, and more than 25 percent of adults earning more than \$50,000 a year were obese.

Arenas said the merger of United Way of Mercer County and Northern Mercer County United Way was good.

"I'm excited about the new vision," she said.

Barbenders Gym in the Hermitage Plaza recently merged with YMCA, Arenas said. None of the workers at Barbenders lost their jobs, she said, and none of the members lost memberships.

The keynote speaker was Lloyd Lamm, regional banking executive at First National Bank. Lamm was also a part of the Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission. Through first-hand experience, Lamm said he knew how important early childhood education was not only to the kids, but to society at large.

Lamm said 90 percent of neurological development happened before a child entered kindergarten; however, the bulk of public spending came after the first five years of life. For every 50 children who entered first grade behind the reading curve, Lamm said 44 of them would remain there by fourth grade.

Kids who got early learning support were more likely to finish high school, go to college and not go to jail, Lamm said. High school dropouts were 3½ times more likely to be arrested and more than eight times

more likely to be in prison.

Lamm went to an early childhood education class in Harrisburg, he said, and was surprised by the orderly atmosphere. Two pieces of bread, one fresh, one moldy, were attached to the blackboard, and Lamm asked why they were there. A child explained the fresh bread had been touched by kids who'd just washed their hands, and the moldy bread was touched by kids who hadn't.

"Early education ... is absolutely critical," Lamm said.

Lamm praised both Democrats and Republicans in Pennsylvania for passing early education bills and recognizing how critical it was for early education to succeed.

"We need each other and we need to watch out for each other," Lamm said.

United Way agencies were working together to save money and serve more people, Lamm said. UW held economic summits to let business leaders know how important it was to invest in early childhood development programs.

Lamm said, "The challenge continues to be in front of you."

was also recognized for its contributions with a Campaign Excellence Award. The Reynolds company collects scrap metal and converts it for use in the aerospace, automobile and electronics industries, among others. Rich Tinsman, general manager, said GMI started a United Way campaign last year which raised more than \$12,000 in the face of a slow-down in the manufacturing sector.

One of the things GMI does for its employees, Tinsman said, was to allow them an extra three days vacation per year to volunteer for community service.

The other Campaign Excellence Award went to Hermitage School District and its effort to get all schools in the county more involved with United Way. Superintendent Dan Bell said giving in his school went up 282.8 percent, and the Success By 6 program showed first-hand positive impact in Hermitage.

Volunteer Excellence Awards went to Joe and Ruthanne George and Nancy Lukasko. Joe George took over Joy Cone Co. in

1964 and grew it from \$25,000-a-year business the largest ice cream provider in the world. Ruthanne was a graduate of Jamestown High School and Thiel College, and served on Thiel's board of trustees. Lukasko volunteered to be the first Success By 6 coordinator in Mercer County and Brookfield and Masury in Ohio. As part of the honor, each of the three will have a classroom named for them and their respective alternates — Joe in Sharpsburg, Ruthanne in Jamestown and Lukasko in Brookfield.

The United Way also bestowed Special Recognition Awards upon outgoing board chairperson Richard Epstein and Frank and Linda Evans. Epstein took over as United Way of Mercer County merged with Northern Mercer County United Way, helped rewrite the bylaws and came up with the Campaign Roundtable Initiative which is a collaboration between the United Way and the top businesses in the community. The Evans