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NCEF Partners with Community Leaders to Bring Community Awareness Message

EAST FRANKLIN -- Armstrong County couldn't possibly build enough jails to hold drug dealers and perpetrators of domestic violence, and the taxpayers couldn't afford it if they did, said District Attorney Scott Andreassi.

Andreassi, speaking at the annual Community Awareness Day luncheon held at Harvest Community Church, said he expects the message to reach more than 45,000 Armstrong County residents.

Andreassi's message was simple enough, the county must fight the drug and violence problem not only through aggressive law enforcement measures, but also through education and cooperation with agencies such as HAVIN, a shelter for victims of domestic abuse, ARC Manor, an addiction recovery treatment center, and the Armstrong, Freeport, Apollo-Ridge and Leechburg school districts, and most of all, churches and civic organizations.

"Four years ago District Judge J. Gary DeComo came to me and Sheriff Crawford and presented his idea for a community outreach educational program to combat the growing drug problem in the county," Andreassi said. "That's how Community Awareness Day was born. We had our first meeting here at Harvest Community Church, because in part, we want the churches of the county to help carry our message to the community."

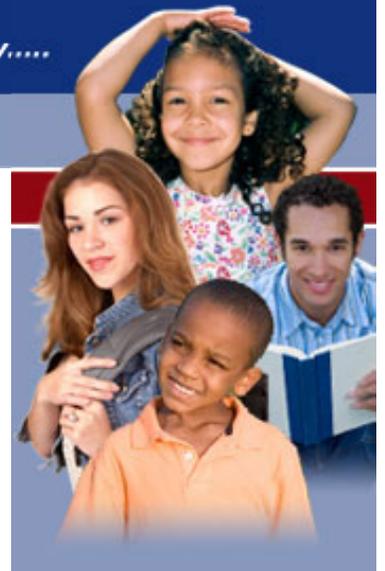
Andreassi said a program called Winter Family Celebration will be open free of charge to children, teens and families from 4-8 p.m., Monday at the Lenape Technical School gymnasium. The event, sponsored by Lenape Technical School, District Judge DeComo, Sheriff Larry Crawford, Andreassi, the ACMH Foundation, Barker Bus Co., and others, will feature family photos, Sumo wrestling, a DJ/Karaoke, a magician, crafts and clowns, moon walk, video games and food.

Andreassi then introduced Awareness Day guest speaker, Bill Sanders, from The National Character Education Foundation, contributing author to "Chicken Soup for the Soul" and author of more than 14 books.

"We all have choices," Sanders said, "and it takes courage to make them. We have a choice as to what role we'll play in this battle for our kid's lives."

Citing the parable of the Good Samaritan, Sanders said the story illustrates three types of people.

"First there are the 'robbers,'" he said. "These are the ones who take from others leaving behind destroyed lives. In the Biblical parable we had a priest and a Levite pass by the injured victim but did nothing to help. What's interesting is that they didn't do anything wrong, they just did nothing. We have a lot of people in our communities today who fall into this category. They would rather look the other way and not get involved. Finally we have the good Samaritan. He did get involved. He went out of his way to help someone in need. Everyone who gets involved with this program in anyway falls into the good Samaritan category."



Sanders told the audience about how he came to grips with a crisis in his own family by becoming aware that a problem was there to deal with and his personal involvement was needed.

"I write books about how teens and families can avoid problems with things like drugs, alcohol, violence and teen pregnancy," he said. "Several years ago my oldest daughter came to me crying. She told me she was pregnant. I had a problem in my own family. I became very angry, especially at her boyfriend. I couldn't set my anger aside. Several weeks later I was in Colorado and saw an old friend of mine. His daughter had been killed in the Columbine school shootings. I told him about my problem and how it was eating at me. He began to cry and he told me he envied me.

"I was shocked, but then he explained that he wished he could have been with his daughter in her final hour of life. He said he wished he could hold her and talk with her. He said he didn't have that opportunity. He no longer had his daughter, but I still had mine. That was a turning point for me. Today I have a four-year-old grandson who I love very much. We've got to be like the good Samaritan when it comes to dealing with our children. We cannot pass them by. That's what Community Awareness Day is all about. If you are not part of the solution then you are part of the problem."

After Sander's address, Andreassi asked the audience of about 200 what they were going to do when they left the luncheon.

"This is not then end. We must be part of the solution," he said. "We have got to be committed to making a difference. We have to be willing to fix broken lives. I hope every one will take advantage of the Winter Family Celebration next Monday and make it a family affair. District Judge Samuel Goldstrohm has had 9,000 flyers advertising this event printed up and they will be distributed Sunday by virtually every church in the county and will be available elsewhere as well. We hope everyone will get involved by attending this event and by following through during the coming year."

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