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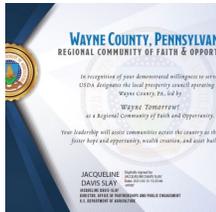
A monthly e-newsletter brought to you by the Wayne County Commissioners

VOL. 2, ISSUE 4

APRIL 2021

Wayne Tomorrow! A county-sponsored, community-based collaboration focused on the projects, resources and infrastructure needed to move Wayne County, its people, its culture and its economy into a vibrant future.

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USDA Designates Wayne County for 1-on-1 Tech Assistance



The US Department of Agriculture designated Wayne County as a "Regional Community of Faith and Opportunity," unlocking one-on-one technical assistance from it and other federal agencies.

Jacqueline Davis Slay, Acting Director of the USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement, made the announcement, noting, "This designation expresses our belief in you and your ability to positively change your community."

USDA launched the Center for Community Prosperity program in 2018. Communities engage in a bottom up, locally driven process to address challenges in

their region, and foster hope, opportunity, wealth creation, and asset building in rural and underserved areas. These efforts aligned perfectly with what Wayne Tomorrow! was already doing.

The journey to the designation began in the fall of 2019, when Wayne Tomorrow! was invited to a Center for Community Prosperity Training Summit at Penn State University. Wayne Tomorrow! Community Network Specialist Kim Rickard was one of several presenters and gave an overview of the initiative and the challenges the county and its growth initiative face. Wayne Tomorrow! submitted a comprehensive application in July of 2020.

Part of the plan is to help communities establish "Local Prosperity Councils" that engage the OneUSDA Team, federal, state, regional organizations and public and private entities in meeting and overcoming the challenges rural communities face. The designation entitles Wayne County to custom and tailored technical assistance from a USDA liaison who will assist the county on USDA programs and initiatives. The liaison will develop and maintain partnerships with key USDA stakeholders to encourage and enhance greater outreach between USDA stakeholders, agencies, and staff offices.

In its application, Wayne Tomorrow! listed a handful of priority projects that could benefit from the technical expertise of OneUSDA Team and its partners, including the development of resilient local food system through the Wayne County Agriculture Innovation Center and the proposed Recovery to Work Ecosystem in partnership with SCI Waymart.

The application also targets infrastructure and resiliency through projects like expanding Broadband services, development and preparation of industrial spaces to attract higher wage employers, strategic investment in education infrastructure and programming for post-secondary and career training and addressing rural transportation issues.

Other projects address the need for affordable rental units as well as more upscale rental housing to meet workforce recruitment needs of established and future businesses, and develop a system of Community Hubs that can strengthen communities by providing opportunities for social interaction, increasing access to resources and utilizing more countywide facilities.

Four WTI! Partners Collaborate for ARC Nonprofit Training



The impact of COVID-19 has been felt in nearly every segment of the community, and non-for-profit organizations are no exception. The nonprofit sector, generally speaking, operates within thin margins that were significantly disrupted during the pandemic, from fundraising to recruitment. In rural areas, these organization often provide key resources and services.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) recognized the potential long-term threat and created the recently launched Appalachia Nonprofit Resource Center, a virtual training hub to help them navigate these challenges.

"The COVID crisis caused financial hardship for many of the important nonprofit organizations in Appalachian communities," said ARC Federal Co-Chairman Tim Thomas. "The Appalachia Nonprofit Resource Center will help those whose work is an essential part of a diverse economy, and will offer skills for long-term sustainability to ensure that nonprofits remain assets in our Region."

In true Wayne Tomorrow! fashion, four local nonprofits – Wayne Economic Development Corp., Wayne Pike Workforce Alliance, The Chamber of the Northern Poconos and the Greater Honesdale Partnership – applied as a group for intensive training and coaching on how to overcome operational and management challenges.

"This team approach will strengthen each individual organization while also helping to address the underlying issue of lack of organizational capacity that is such a challenge within rural communities," said WEDCO Executive Director Mary Beth Wood. "We're extremely grateful to the Appalachian Regional Commission to accept us as a cohort and to enable us to have this training opportunity. This is truly Wayne Tomorrow!"

According to ARC, this specialized technical assistance uses a collaborative learning model where the 100-plus selected nonprofits will be clustered into small groups to effectively provide customized coaching, productive peer-to-peer exchanges, and focused networking to navigate shared challenges associated with the COVID crisis.

"They applied together for the Technical Assistance Program, another indication of the ongoing collaboration between and among these key organizations that has been recognized by the Appalachian Regional Commission and other state and federal agencies," said ARC Consultant John Bauser. "All four organizations were accepted in a highly competitive process, and each participated fully in their courses and contributed significantly to the vibrant class discussions."

"It has been an honor to be able to participate in the ARC training program," said Debbie Gillette of the Chamber of the Northern Poconos. "The information we have learned will help assist not only our own organizations, but also can be shared within our communities through Wayne Tomorrow!"

PIVOT & PROVIDE

Dedication, Preparedness Kept WMH Ahead of COVID-19 Curve



For Wayne Memorial Hospital, the specter of COVID-19 hit home on March 5, 2020. That was the day Chief Executive Officer Dave Hoff learned of the non-profit hospital's first suspected case while attending the monthly Wayne Tomorrow! Action Committee meeting.

In the early days, he said they were facing new challenges every other day as the health and safety regulations were changing all the time. "We were aiming at a moving target as we made sure we were complying with guidelines on visitation and elective surgery and educating our employees and the public (on safe practices)."

He credits the hospitals' successful navigation of these unprecedented challenges to the core group of professional staff, assembled by Director of Patient Care Services James Pettinato, RN, MHSA, who led the charge.

Pettinato said one major objective was to separate not only COVID-19 patients, but also the staff members who would be caring for them. Wayne Memorial Hospital first introduced telemedicine decades ago and used it often for neurological and other high-level medical consultations. Leveraging in-house resources, the hospital pulled out retired equipment to establish telecommunications with the COVID ward.

"This allowed for consultations with in-house specialists without having to enter the COVID unit," he explained. Even more importantly, the telemedicine link allowed visitation by family members, Pettinato said, especially when the patient might feel too poorly to operate their own electronic devices.

Hoff said this set up also had the advantage of helping to conserve Personal Protective Equipment, by limiting the number of people coming and going from the 20 negative-pressure COVID rooms.

At the Wayne Memorial Community Health Center level, Executive Director Fred Jackson said there were really three pivots: the initial shut down, reopening and now vaccinations. That first case presented at one the health centers, so the first order of business was to address the exposure. They, too, turned to telehealth strategies, urging those who thought they might be infected to call, rather than visit, and get tested. If symptoms worsened, they were urged to seek medical care.

Jackson said the strategy was effective, although there were exposures and one office had to be closed entirely. However, by July, the clinics began to see significant deferral of care in terms of routine screenings, which continued throughout the year.

As the vaccine roll out began, Jackson said there were no other groups coming in to take the lead so Wayne Memorial took on that role, creating a registration and alert system for patients interested in getting the shot and operating Vaccine Clinics.

Hoff said the pandemic really demonstrated the commitment and flexibility of the staff at Wayne Memorial Hospital, where every job changed in the face of COVID-19. "People were anxious and scared," he said, "but they really pitched in. We did the best we could not to put people in harm's way and to make sure our staff was safe and well educated (about the virus)."

Just as crucial to Wayne Memorial Hospital and Health System as the dedication of its employees has been the profound support of the community. Hoff said many individuals and businesses offered solidarity to the frontline workers by buying or donating meals to staff members, making masks and sewing gowns.

Hoff said local contractors brought in their mobile equipment to create more negative pressure rooms, and the Hospital's Board of Trustees has been extremely supportive in the face of unexpected costs for equipment, lab services and supplies. Ultimately, according to Fred Jackson, the agility of Wayne Memorial to pivot and provide in the face of COVID-19 came from preparedness planning. "It kept us ahead of the curve."

Pettinato agreed, saying they mobilized the incident command structure, which includes all aspects of operations, for daily phone calls. Eventually the briefings became weekly and included the school districts to share information and knowledge from medical professionals as they looked to reopen. Now bi-weekly, the calls continue.

Today, the focus is squarely on the vaccines and encouraging the public to get the shot.

"The outpouring of support," said Hoff, "is what makes Honesdale a special place. It's been very gratifying as CEO that the community wanted to help in any way they could."

Farmer-to-Farmer Helps Recruit for Agriculture Apprenticeships



The Wayne Tomorrow! Agriculture Task Force recognizes the long-term need to train agricultural laborers as well as the next generation of farm owner/operators and has been working with the Wayne Pike Workforce Alliance and others to create local apprenticeship opportunities.

The Cooperage Project recently hosted a Farmer-to-Farmer informational program on the available apprenticeships in an effort to recruit potential farms to participate. A future program is planned to recruit students.

Dan Dalton of the PA Association of Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) said the organization is working to produce skilled workers in all aspects of farming, and currently offers two apprenticeships: Dairy Grazing and Diversified Vegetables. Apprenticeship programs are particularly important in agriculture because it is difficult to learn in school. "Farming is practical and experiential," he explained.

For the master farmer, an apprentice provides motivated labor and an extended work commitment. Dalton said these relationships can play into succession planning, as so many farmers begin considering retirement or lease arrangements.

For the apprentice farmer, participation in the program helps reduce risks. "From day one you have to do everything as a new farmer," Dalton explained, noting these practical experiences, paired with related educational instruction can help with the learning curve. Apprenticeships can also lower barriers, enhance networking and transition as well as access to commercial credit.

The farm finds and hires the apprentice to ensure a good fit, and PASA handles the reporting to the PA Department of Labor. Dalton noted new master farmers will need to navigate the challenges of recruiting, managing and mentoring the apprentice and making a commitment to ensure they acquire the necessary skills.

PASA graduated its first three apprentices in 2020, and Dalton reports two of them are owner/operators and the third is a farm manager.

Along with a shortage of farmers, Tim Wentz of the Northeast Equipment Dealers Association (NEDA) says there is a need for 1,000 qualified farm machinery mechanics over the next ten years to replace those heading for retirement. To that end and with the help of the Wayne Pike Workforce Alliance, the Association has created an apprenticeship at Marshall Machinery, near Beach Lake.

Wentz said NEDA owns the apprenticeship and administers it on behalf of Marshall Machinery, which hires the individual and develops an employment agreement. The students are paid with federal funds and are limited to shops with at least five journeymen, but employers can be grouped together for the purposes of the classroom instruction.

"Kids today -- veterans and adults, too -- ask themselves why spend a lot of money on college when on the other side of the apprenticeship are family-sustaining wages," he explained. For the dealership, "It is an opportunity to get future employees trained to work just the way you want them to work," Wentz said.

Contact information for these apprenticeships and other resources are available at www.WayneTomorrow.com.

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