

EOC IN THE NEWS

2007

February 20, 2007

Victoria Barone
Warren Times Observer

Growing Business

GANE program gets aspiring local entrepreneurs on right foot

Sometimes great ideas need a little help getting off the ground.

The GANE program provided by Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) provides that help to entrepreneurs and their businesses.

“We’re looking for the mom and pop businesses,” Coordinator Dave Sherman said, explaining that GANE (Grow a New Enterprise) works with microenterprise, or small businesses typically employing no more than five people.

It is designed to help people successfully start and grow businesses.

“We want to meet the needs of people with dreams of self-employment, but not a lot of business background,” Sherman said.

Launched in early 2006, the program was developed by EOC with the help of Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA). MEDA provided a program model that has been successful nationwide, consisting of practical training in planning and running a business, small loans, and ongoing support. Students meet weekly and work through each step of developing their business plans.

The classes are offered at no charge and there are generally three to four 10-week classes held each year. So far, all have been held in Warren, mostly at the EOC building, but the upcoming class, beginning on Feb. 21, will be held in Tionesta.

No regular classes are held in the summer, but they resume in the fall. And the EOC may hold an entrepreneur camp for high school students this summer.

“Our goal, when they finish 10 weeks, is for them to have a completed business plan and be aware of issues,” Sherman said.

An example of some of the issues pertinent to business are sole proprietorship versus incorporation, and how to compete.

“Obviously, marketing is a issue – where do I set my price? And some accounting concepts and break even analysis,” Sherman said.

“Through course work, the class, which usually has between 10 and 15 members, learns what should and shouldn’t be workable.

“We had a young lady who wants to make and sell candles. When she saw that she would have to sell 162 candles just to break even each month, she changed her approach,” he said. “...It’s not uncommon for them to say ‘maybe I need to branch out.’”

Even if students bring ideas to class and determine it is unlikely to work in this area, that alone is worthwhile, according to Sherman, because it saves them from committing to a failed enterprise.

And they tend to come up with other ideas, rather than simply giving up on their dream of business ownership.

“We can’t guarantee that you’re going to make it or you’re going to fail, be we’re going to expose the issues,” Sherman said.

Students also do target market research. For example, they imagine that they own a pizzeria, and look for ways to succeed in that business.

There are a number of factors involved in successful business, Sherman said. The students look at location, pricing, convenience to the customer, customer service, and quality of the product.

Sherman noted that students find out that “this is hands-on and I’ve got to do my homework and report back to the facilitator. This isn’t sit and listen... You’ve got to show me that (your idea) is going to work.”

Students test their ideas on the class as well. Embroiderer Becky Walters brought in the sign she planned to use to advertise her business for the class to critique. Later on, “She put the sign up and lo and behold, people started calling,” Sherman said.

Walters operates the business out of her Youngsville home. She took the course, with her husband Sam serving as support, she said.

The business was already in operation when she took the class.

“We just thought it would be good for us to get some new ideas and see if we were doing the right things,” she said.

Walters considers it time very well spent.

“We’ve gotten a lot of feedback from the other people, and they’ve helped with some ideas, and helped with the business. It’s just great to get together with them,” she said.

She added that she would definitely recommend the class to anyone with a small business or anyone interested in starting one.

“Dave is such a great person to run the meetings,” she said. “It seems like his mind is working 100 miles an hour.”

Students have attended the class from throughout Warren and Forest counties, and from Chautauqua County, N.Y. Sherman pointed out that that has created a lot of networking opportunities. The students also receive a great deal of peer support.

“We had a room full of 15 strangers who, for the most part, became friends...And the beauty is they get together after graduation on a biweekly basis. The program doesn’t stop at graduation,” Sherman said.

Attendance at the after-graduation classes is optional. Speakers address the graduates on a regular basis on such subjects as the insurance industry and various small businesses.

“One thing we want to do with brag about our graduates,” Sherman said.

Craig Rogers, whose HVAC business is now up and running, is one such student. Sherman encourages each member of the class to give him a business card so that he can refer customers to their businesses as the opportunities arise.

Just weeks after collecting the cards, Sherman overheard two colleagues discussing the challenge of finding a good heating business to fulfill contracts with the EOC’s weatherization program that helps low-income families improve the energy efficiency of their homes. He saw an opportunity for Rogers, and on Sherman’s referral, his colleagues met with and gave Rodgers his first job.

“The most important things I learned from the GANE class were marketing and customer service,” Rodgers said. “It’s important to know how people see you.”

As the winter came on, the flow of EOC referrals continued.

“They’re keeping me real busy,” Rodgers said. “Taking the class and getting the EOC contract has brought me a ton of work.”

Another class member, Tina West, is opening a winery and gift shop in Sheffield this spring with Alan Chapel. West said she and Chapel had the idea when they started the class.

“What I was basically here for was the business plan,” West said, “but it turned into much more as far as friends and contacts go.”

Sherman invites anyone interested in opening a business (or those already interested in business) to attend the classes. If interested, call Sherman at 406-7357 or email him at sherman@wfcaa.org.

“All we ask is that they bring the idea and some enthusiasm,” he said.

January 15, 2007

Victoria Barone
Warren Times Observer

Kick Starting Main Street Grants Sought to Boost Downtowns

Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council Executive **Director Robert Raible** plans to hand deliver the EOC’s application for funding for the Regional Main Street Program next week in Harrisburg.

“We are finishing the final touches on the application, and I have an appointment with the Department of Community and Economic Development and Pennsylvania Downtown Center. We will be hand delivering it (next) Thursday,” Raible said.

The EOC is applying for \$50,000 for the first year and \$105,000 for the second year, including \$60,000 in façade funds. This is all part of a countywide Main Street revitalization project. The boroughs of Sugar Grove, Tidioute, and Youngsville, and Sheffield Township are participating. Much of the funding will be used for façade work on businesses as well as for hiring a Main Street Manager. The program will operate much like the City of Warren’s Main Street Program does, but on a larger scale, covering all four areas involved.

The Pennsylvania Downtown Project, part of the DCED, is working with the EOC on the application. Grant funds require a 50 percent match from participating communities.

“One of the reasons we’re hand delivering (the application) is that several of the communities are already chomping at the bit to do some façade stuff,” Raible said, noting once the required paperwork is in, he wants to communicate to the state, “let’s work together and see if we can get this done more quickly. Some business people want to get busy on their facades and each of the four (municipalities) are looking at streetscapes, which will also blend right in with everything else.”

Raible said with January about half over, those in the communities involved are anxious to have everything in place to begin projects in the upcoming warm weather months.

“If we want to do anything this summer, we need to move,” he said. “We don’t want to miss another renovation season.”

Raible explained that funding is designed for a four-year period and the EOC and communities are involved have made a four-year commitment to the program. Additional programs and funding will also support the program work, according to Raible.

Raible says he hopes to get word on funding soon after he delivers the application, and that this is one of his motives in traveling personally to Harrisburg.

“We want to put the pressure on Harrisburg to make a decision. The communities and all the volunteers would like to have started a year ago. Everyone is anxious and wants to get moving,” Raible said.

January 15, 2007

Victoria Barone
Warren Times Observer

...Then, How to Spend the Money

Once funding for Warren County’s Main Street Program is secured, the municipalities involved must determine exactly how to spend the money.

Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) has applied to the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) for \$50,000 for the first year of a four-year program, and \$105, 000 for the second year. The funds will pay for a Main Street manager and façade work in the four participating municipalities – Sugar Grove, Tidioute, and Youngsville boroughs and Sheffield Township.

In Sheffield Township secretary/treasurer Kristi Kulka said funds will be spent “shaping up the storefronts” in downtown Sheffield, on Main St., Center St., and Leather St.

“We’ve been getting the grant application done and now we’ll have meetings with all our people. That’s the next step,” Kulka said.

Kulka noted that the township has taken \$4,300 (two dollars per capita) to put in the 2007 budget toward mating funds for the grant. That match will be earmarked in the budgets of 2008, 2009, and 2010 as well, according to Kulka.

In Youngsville Borough, the project is being directed by the Revitalization of Youngsville (ROY), Youngsville Borough Supervisor and ROY President Nancy Holmberg explained that the Regional Partnership Movement or RPM (composed of all the municipalities involved in the Main Street Program) was created to work together on the project.

“People have been traveling between our communities and we support each other,” Holmberg said.

In Youngsville, façade work on businesses will be done on portions of Main Street and Railroad Street, designated by the Pennsylvania Downtown Center.

2006

November 9, 2006

Brian Ferry
Warren Times Observer

Commissioners approve budget

There is no tax increase included in the preliminary budget approved Wednesday by the commissioners.

“I’m proud of this budget,” Commissioner John Eggleston said. “There’s no fat in this budget anywhere. I think it’s as lean as we can make it.”

Commissioner John Bortz agreed. “This is a very lean budget,” he said. “But it’s a very functional budget.”

The budget shows a decrease in expenditures of more than \$100,000 from last year. But there is a larger decrease in revenues—about \$350,000.

The county’s cash balance will take a hit if the revenues and expenditures fall exactly as listed in the preliminary budget. Finance Director Toby Rohlin said the balance would go from \$692,000 to \$429,000 according to the budget.

But there is at least one area of significant potential savings not listed in the budget.

Rohlin said the county’s health insurance expenses may decrease substantially—perhaps about \$250,000—without changing the coverage at all. But, “It’s a little premature to put that in the budget at this time,” he said.

While the level of expenditures is down as a whole, the commissioners proudly announced the amount of funds allocated to economic development increased by \$50,000.

Commissioner David Bauer said the economic development allocations have grown from \$20,000 in the commissioners’ first year to \$300,000 this year.

He said the level of funding allows the county to follow up on economic development studies performed in past years.

Bauer pointed to the increased staffing in the veterans affairs and planning and zoning offices as key points in the budget.

“We’re increasing our support for our veterans office,” he said. “That’s very important. We have a very high percentage of veterans.”

Adding another staff member to the planning and zoning department will, hopefully, bring more grant money to municipalities throughout the county, he said.

All three commissioners expressed their appreciation to the department heads for working hard to keep expenditures down.

In particular, the largest county department in terms of budget, the Sheriff’s office and jail, shows a decrease in expenditures of almost \$140,000 from last year.

As recently as Oct. 30, the proposal from the department represented an 11 percent increase over last year.

“Any time you can hold the line on taxes and keep spending in check, that’s marvelous,” Eggleston said

The commissioners passed the preliminary budget unanimously. There is a 20-day public review period mandated before a final budget can be enacted.

Downtown Warren

Although the commissioners did not give as much to the Warren Downtown Revitalization Program as Warren Main Street requested, they did allocated a significant sum.

The initial request in early October was \$500,000.

That money would come from the county’s Growing Greener allocation from the state.

The commissioners unanimously voted Wednesday to give \$175,000 to show their support for the effort without expending their entire Growing Greener allocation on a small area of the county.

Bortz said the amount was “a good blend for our support for the project while being fiscally responsible.”

We’re showing some very substantial support,” he said.

And Bauer said the remainder of the Growing Greener funds could be spread around to good use. "This is a very concentrated area of the downtown," Bauer said. "We have to think about other areas."

Part of the reason for the support was the specific and developed proposal brought to the commissioners.

"This is a program that's fully developed," Eggleston said. "The city's behind it. They're ready to go."

Elections

"We were out by 9:15 p.m." County Director of Elections Diane Bloomgren said. "We really need to thank those poll workers. They're the ones who are there at 6:30 a.m."

Bauer said other areas of the state were complaining about poll workers with insufficient training and other problems.

"Not a problem here," he said. "These people do a tremendous job."

October 29, 2006

Times Observer

Donation to Pre-K Program

The **Warren-Forest EOC** received a \$10,000 check from PNC Bank for their Pre-K education program at a brief ceremony on Wednesday afternoon. Pictured, left to right, are Jeffrey Szumigale, senior vice president managing director, PNC Advisors; David Bauer, Warren County Commissioner; Karen Davis, vice president, EOC board of directors; Marlene Mosco, president, Northwest Pennsylvania region, PNC Bank; Gretchen Tremblay, trust investment officer; and Gregory Fischer, senior vice president, PNC advisors.

October 19, 2006

Times Observer

EOC Scholarship Program Donation

The Pre-K Scholarship program, sponsored by EOC's Early Care and Education Coalition, received a \$20,000 check from Northwest Savings Bank as part of Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program. The scholarship program

helps families in Warren and Forest Counties with costs associated with early care and education programs for children enrolled in quality Pre-K sites. Picture, from left, are Brenda Bortz, Coalition member, Robert Raible, EOC Executive Director, Stephanie Freitag, Northwest Savings Bank, Manager of Warren West Side, and Tish Montgomery, Coalition member. For information about the program, call Tish Montgomery at 726-1361.

October 19, 2006

Times Observer

Donation to GANE program

Dave Sherman, coordinator of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council's GANE program, receives a check from Paul Schultz, office manager of Northwest Savings Bank, to help establish a revolving loan fund within EOC's GANE program. The GANE (Grow a New Enterprise) program aids entrepreneurs such as Tina West, also pictured, in realizing their economic goals.

October 17, 2006

Times Observer

County approves grant to fund EOC

The Warren County Commissioners gave concurring approval for a grant to provide financial assistance to the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council during Monday's work session at the Warren County Courthouse.

Robert Raible, EOC executive director, approached the commissioners for approval for an additional \$1,500 in grant assistance. The request required two signatures by the county commissioners.

Three representatives from the state's Department of State attended the work session to offer the county Help American to Vote (HAVA) assistance. The representatives inspected the county's electronic voting machines and observed storage methods for the units.

October 11, 2006

Times Observer

Warren County Child Care Facilities and Preschools

Warren County is extremely fortunate to have quality child care facilities and preschools available for children of our community. Not only do they provide a positive environment for children to spend their day, they offer learning activities to develop social, emotional, and academic skills.

Warren County YMCA Preschool

SCHOOL'S IN! Preschool is up and running with 68 eager students. We started in September with an Ocean Unit. The preschool bulletin board resembled the ocean with each class putting their pictures on seahorses, crabs, fish, lobsters and whales. After a bus ride to the Busti Cider Mill, we have been learning about apples and aardvarks and other words that begin with A.

We will be using the Open Court phonemic system and our computers as we work our way through the alphabet. We are also well on our way to meeting the new Pre-K state standards in math, science, language and literacy, social studies, physical health, personal social and creative arts. The children have swimming lessons two days each week and a gym class one day each week. In October, the 4 year olds will travel to the Warren Fire Station and the 3 year olds will see a fire truck from United Refinery at the Y. The YMCA is a great place to be! The YMCA participates in the Keystone STARS quality rating system and is currently at STAR 1.

The Presbyterian Church Day Care Center

Bright, cheery classrooms bursting with fun learning experiences can be found throughout the First Presbyterian Church Day Care Center. These classrooms are newly remodeled and our small class sizes help teachers provide our children with an exceptional learning experience. Fun weekly themes highlight our days as we follow the Open Court reading program. Our daily activities are designed to help prepare our children both socially and academically to enter the school district.

Coming in October, the Center is looking forward to Pony Day when the staff and children dress like cowboys and cowgirls and get pictures taken with a live pony. Our Halloween celebration and parade will be held on October 31st. Parent involvement at our center is encouraged and welcome as "Together, we can make a difference" in a child's life. First Presbyterian Church Day Care is a STAR 1 in the Keystone Stars quality rating system.

North Warren Presbyterian Community Day Care

The preschool classes at North Warren Presbyterian Community Day Care began on Tuesday, September 5th. Our three year old classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays,

while our four year old classes are on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. We begin our days with guided play, which includes centers to practice math skills such as counting, patterns, letter names and sounds. In addition, fine motor skills such as stringing beads and working with scissors are a part of each day. We use the Open Court reading program for phonics and language development.

Daily music and physical education activities, as well as cooking activities on Fridays, help to encourage healthy minds and bodies. With activities like these, learning is fun at NWPCDC! NWPCDC is at the Start with Stars level in the Keystone Stars quality rating system.

October 10, 2006

Dean Wells
Times Observer

Tidioute Council encouraged to join Main Street program

Warren County Commissioner David Bauer addressed Tidioute Borough Council on Monday night to encourage it to enter into the proposed Warren County Main Street program.

“This is an initiative that the county commissioners are very strongly in support of,” Bauer told council.

The county Main Street Program would work to rehabilitate downtown areas in four targeted communities: Sheffield, Youngsville, Sugar Grove and Tidioute. According to Bauer, the commissioners have already received commitments from Sheffield, Youngsville and Sugar Grove officials to enter the program.

The commissioners have approved \$7,500 a year for four years in funding for the program. Bauer said the county’s contribution is a capped funding source. “It will remain the same for the four years,” he said. The county Main Street program will be responsible for raising any other needed funds.

Bauer told council that once a community enters into the program, the community becomes eligible for façade grants and streetscape grants, similar to the project proposed for downtown Warren. After four years, the county Main Street program can be upgraded to an Elm Street program, which concentrates on rehabilitating residential areas.

“This is a very powerful program,” Bauer said. “I just want you to know that, as a commissioner, we’re really standing behind this. We would really be delighted if Tidioute saw fit to participate. I think out of four of these communities, Tidioute might have the most to gain in its downtown.”

Council President Fran Stoneburg thanked Bauer for his comments and then informed him that council would be ready to make a decision on the program at its November meeting.

In other business, council sent a letter to the county commissioners, thanking the county for filling in an \$11,251 shortfall in funding for the \$61,003 CDBG paving project of Sheridan and Water Streets.

U.S. Congressman John Peterson, R-Fifth, sent council a letter of congratulations, commemorating Tidioute's bicentennial. Council plans to have the letter framed to mark the occasion.

September 17, 2006

Times Observer

Starting a business?

On Wednesday, Sept. 20, the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council will hold an informational meeting for people interested in attending educational classes regarding the start and growth of a small business.

The meeting will be from 6 to 7 p.m. in the EOC building's second-floor conference room.

Classes will begin on Wednesday, Sept. 27 and end on Wednesday, Dec. 6. To register, call 726-2400 ext. 3035 or via email at sherman@wfcaa.org.

September 13, 2006

Linda Council
Warren Times Observer

Tidioute Council dedicated family tree at park

Tidioute Borough council members met at Picture Show Park prior to meeting on Monday to dedicate the "Moment in Time" family tree.

Fran Stoneburg, council president, spoke on the dedication. The council was the beneficiary of an insurance policy from Donna Powell, daughter of Dr. & Mrs. Frank Buckingham.

Secretary Pat Redick came up with the idea of doing something involving the residents of the borough. Council commissioned Luke Morgan, local artist, to create a tree with the name of all the residents names who resided in the Borough as of Jan. 1, 2006.

Bob Raible from County Regional Main Street Program was present to discuss the Main Street Four Point Approach: a Matrix for Guiding Action Strategy Development. The start date to give businesses a lift is set to begin in January 1, 2007.

Marty Bennett, Pennsylvania State Championship Fishing Tournament member was present and requested that Greene Street and Railroad Street be closed for the State Tournament beginning Sept. 21 through 24: permission was granted.

Sept. 22 along with Saturday and Sunday will be free parking in conjunction with fishing tournament weekend.

Following a long discussion on litter on the sidewalks and downtown streets it was noted that anyone caught littering will be issued a citation and fined. Property owners including businesses are responsible for keeping the sidewalks and street in front of their establishments cleaned up.

Mayor Pam McLaughlin reported that she has been receiving several complaints on barking dogs. Pet owners are reminded of the ordinance on barking dogs.

Police Chief Vincent reported traveling 751 miles for the past month and some of his cases included one theft, one theft by deception, one business found open during routine checks just to name a few of the incidents he covered.

Council will be checking into insurance policies and comparing costs of several companies for the best rates.

The borough still needs an Emergency Management Coordinator, anyone interested in filling this position should contact the borough office for more information.

A resolution was passed for the Minimum Municipal Obligation for Employee Pension Plan for 2007.

September 13, 2006

Terry Williams
Warren Times Observer

Youngsville Borough Council meets

Youngsville Borough Council has agreed to support efforts to hire a Regional Main Street Manager by providing a \$1 per capita match, or \$1,800, to the cause. The Regional Main Street Program will cover Youngsville, Sugar Grove, Sheffield and Tidioute boroughs and will be under the direction of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council. All boroughs and townships that will benefit from the program are being asked to contribute funding. The program will also receive \$8,000 from the Warren County Commissioners.

Council as also agreed to write several letters of support for local organizations seeking grant funding for projects. The Brokenstraw Watershed Council, the Warren County Snowmobile Club and Revitalization of Youngsville are writing various grants for improvement projects in the Youngsville area.

Borough Manager Jim Osborne has contacted PennDot to request a traffic study for the intersection of Rt. 6 and West Main St. The study will determine if the traffic light in that location needs to have left turn arrows incorporated.

The Public Works Department is continuing to fill potholes. The majority of them have been repaired, but the public is asked to report potholes that still need attention before winter.

The dry hydrant at the corner of College and I.O.O.F. streets is partially complete. A tree stump needs to be removed before work can proceed.

Osborne will be asking borough residents to refrain from blowing grass cuttings into the street. The cuttings are an eyesore and clog up storm drains after heavy rains.

The borough collected 4.94 tons of newsprint in August. The next pickup day will be September 27.

September 13, 2006

Victoria Barone
Warren Times Observer

Head Start Moves to Youngsville Area High School

The ideal environment for a Head Start class is in a school, according to Warren-Forest Head Start Director **Roxanne Carifo**.

That's what makes the Head Start program's move from the Rouse Estate to Youngsville Area High School this school year such a good idea, Carifo said.

Head Start, which provides preschool opportunities for three and four-year-olds, is housed at five sites in Warren County and one in Forest County. The Rouse Home Head Start classes will relocate to YAHS at the beginning of classes, on September 19.

“What prompted the move is that Head Start has always been a school readiness program. We do want to partner with the school district, Carifo said. “We have been in some school buildings before, and working with some of the students, especially the high school students, has been really beneficial to our children.

In the past, high school students have been “book buddies” with Head Start children, Carifo noted.

“[Students] actually come into the classroom...Throughout the year they do studies and activities together,” she said. “Our children benefit by having the role models.”

Being in a school environment also helps them to acclimate to school settings, she observed.

The move was also a brick and mortar issue, according to Carifo. With the Rouse Estate building which houses Head Start in Youngsville under serious consideration as an E911 Center, it was a good time to look for a new setting, she said.

“Opportunity was knocking. The space happened to be there at Youngsville. It was just the right opportunity and (YAHS Principal) Dr. (Darrell) Jaskolka was most accommodating...We’re really excited about the partnership with the school district. They were most accommodating and we’re just very happy to be working with them,” Carifo said.

Warren County School District Program Director of State and Federal Programs Rosemarie Green said the move is also beneficial to the YAHS students.

“We’re really excited to have that. We’re really happy to incorporate some of that into some of our current areas of family and consumer sciences,” Green said.

Having the Head Start children in the building “will be really, really neat for those secondary students,” Green said. “We’re hoping it will be one of the strongest components in the program...It will take them a little time to get settled. We’re hoping to do a lot of things in terms of childcare and reading to the kids.”

Green pointed out that working with the children is good preparation for “the real world,” since so many will have children of their own one day.

Green also said YAHS has the space, since the eighth grade students have relocated back to Youngsville Elementary/Middle School this year.

“YEMS was originally designed to be a kindergarten through eight building,” she added.

One or two rooms at YAHS are expected to be used for the Head Start classes.

August 10, 2006

Chuck Hayes
Warren Times Observer

County buying ‘heart of E-911’ Customer Premise Equipment contract OK’d

A contract to purchase “the heart of the E-911 system” has been approved by the Warren County Commissioners.

Meeting at the Warren County Fair in Pittsfield on Wednesday afternoon, the commissioners signed a contract with Verizon to purchase the Customer Premise Equipment (CPE) at a cost of \$228,475.

The equipment will be fully paid for with the E-911 surcharge assessed on Warren County phone customers.

Warren County Commissioner John Bortz described the CPE as being “the heart of the E-911 system.”

Commissioner John Eggleston said the CPE consists of three stations for emergency call operators, complete with computer equipment and software.

Bill Gallagher, the county’s information and technology director, who reviewed the bids submitted in April, said Verizon is prepared to install the new equipment as soon as a communications center is selected and available.

Gallagher said the new equipment has the capacity to handle all calls, including cell phones.

“It will meet current as well as future needs,” said Bortz.

In other business, the commissioners said they have completed a draft of the county’s response to the U.S. Forest Service’s proposed Forest Plan revisions for the Allegheny National Forest.

Commissioner David Bauer said the commissioners’ response addresses “the state of the local economy” and the relationship to the national forest.

Bauer said the “fatal flaw” in the Forest Plan revisions is that the input of local officials was not sought earlier in the process.

If local officials had been asked for input in the early stages, Bauer said, “The scope of the plan would have been altered.”

While the plan does deal with the national forest’s impact on local economies, Bauer said, “The plan doesn’t deal go far enough in many directions.”

While the 17-page draft response has been written, Eggleston said, “We need to go over language and tighten up some things up.”

The deadline for public comment on the proposed Forest Plan revisions is Aug. 28 and Bortz said he hopes the commissioners act on the response at their August 23 meeting. Bortz said the response will be posted on the county’s website and made available to the media after approval.

The commissioners approved an appropriation of \$7,875 per year for each of the next four years as the county’s share of the cost of hiring a Regional Main Street Manager.

Robert Raible, director of the Warren-Forest Economic Opportunity Council, which is overseeing the program, said that Warren County’s regional Main Street Program will become only the third in Pennsylvania.

Initially, Youngsville, Sugar Grove, Sheffield and Tidioute will be involved in the program which will deal with designing and promoting business districts, said Raible, but Russell, Clarendon and other communities may also become part of the program in the future.

The four communities said Raible, have groups of active volunteers, and it is those volunteers in each community “who will drive the program.”

“We want to get moving and we have four very active communities that want to get moving,” said Raible.

July 26, 2006

Victoria Barone
Warren Times Observer

Commissioners approve contract to help boost telecommunications countywide

Warren County’s commissioners approved a contract with Columbia Telecommunications on Wednesday, in an effort to improve broadband, wireless, cable and safety radio communications countywide.

During their meeting in Cherry Grove Township, the commissioners approved the agreement with Columbia Telecommunications for up to \$89,000.

“Today we had the first of several meetings with the Columbia Telecommunications staff,” Commissioner Chairman John Bortz said.

He noted that a pre-engineering document will be created.

The commissioners also approved a contract with R.W. Larson and Associates to study the county warehouse as a location for the county’s 911 center. Commissioner John Eggleston pointed out that the location would serve as a call center and house EMS and EMA offices.

Commissioner David Bauer suggested that the contract also direct the architects to look at property on the Rouse Estate, which is also under construction as the E. 911 Center’s location. Bortz and Eggleston agreed.

The Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry was appointed as the agency to handle applications for some industrial development grant money. Bauer said that LETA grants require an explanation if a county doesn’t have an industrial development agency as the lead agency in seeking the funds.

“I don’t have a problems with this (agreement), but there needs to be follow up,” Bauer said.

Appointments were approved for the county’s recently formed Economic Development Planning Team. Bortz emphasized the importance of the team, particularly in light of the county’s recent identification as a leader in job loss in the state. Thirty-one representatives from the public and private sector will serve on the planning team.

The commissioners authorized the sale of the county’s 49 lever voting machines. The county had to replace them with high tech machines following the Help America Vote Act.

Rick Petruney asked the commissioners what is being done to create a prison board, which he said is a necessity for proper overseeing of the county jail. Bortz replied that the prison board is in the process of being created, and should be in place by October or November.

Walt Atwood talked to the commissioners about the 646 replica restoration, an oil well restoration project begun in the spring. Volunteers are needed to complete the project, which is expected to be complete by the Old Home and Community Day in June 2007.

In other business, Warren County Adult Probation Director Carl McKee explained the county’s Sobriety Checkpoint and DUI enforcement program, which was approved by the commissioners.

The commissioners also awarded a bid to Mahan Motors for a 2002 Dodge Ram pick-up truck for \$10,860. The truck will be used by the county's Department of Human Services.

Also approved by the commissioners was the Homeless Assistance program for 2006-07 and intergovernmental agreements with the **Economic Opportunities Council** and the Salvation Army, and Allegheny National Forest Title III funding for the After School Forestry Youth Development Project.

The Wild Woods Animal Park, open now by appointment and with a grand opening on Labor Day weekend, was also discussed.

The park, located in Cherry Grove Township on Sorenson Rd, has a number of wild animals for the public to see, including cougars, brown bears, wolves, mountain lions and more.

Bauer observed that there is much happening in the township.

"Just because you're small doesn't mean you can't accomplish things," he said.

The commissioners meet next at the Warren County Fairgrounds at 3 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 9.

July 5, 2006

Forest Press

SCI Forest Names Employee of The Month

Amy Byham, employment vocational coordinator at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Forest, was named the prison's employee of the month for June 2006.

"Amy developed the inmate employment office during the activation of SCI Forest and has done so in a seamless and professional manner," said Superintendent Raymond Sobina. "She has risen above and beyond her scope of duties mentoring other staff and continuously producing quality work."

Byham was nominated for this award by her peers and the final selection was made by the administrative staff at SCI Forest. As employee of the month, she received a letter of commendation, a certificate, a designated parking spot and her name on a plaque at the prison.

Byham began her corrections career at SCI Forest in December 2004. Prior to her employment with the Department of Corrections, she worked as an employability case

manager for the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council**. She also has performed county case work for McKean County Children and Youth and was a therapeutic staff support counselor for Beacon Light Behavioral Health Systems.

Byham lives in Kane, PA, with her new husband. They are expecting their first child later this year.

July 1/2, 2006

Warren Times Observer

First grad

Dave Sherman, GANE coordinator, gives Linda A. Mason her Certificate of Achievement for being a business graduate of the first Grow a New Enterprise class offered through a program at the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC).

June 26, 2006

Warren Times Observer

Victoria Barone

New Group homes opening in Warren

Two newly constructed group homes designed for people with chronic mental illness are now available in Warren.

According to the Housing and Neighborhood Development Services (HANDS), which manages the properties, located at 105 Madison Ave. and 103 Falconer St., rent for the properties is federally assisted, with tenants paying 30 percent of their income.

Applicants must meet the Section 8 requirement of having an income at or below \$17,700 per year for one person.

Robert Raible, director of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, said applications are being accepted for the housing. Those interested in the housing may receive an application by calling 1-800-284-4411, ext. 0 or 22, or by stopping at the EOC, 1209 Pennsylvania Ave.

Raible said each home has four bedrooms, and a shared kitchen, living room and bathroom. Each house is designed for four individuals.

“It’s a wonderful option,” Raible said. “They’re very nice, and they’re brand new. They are designed for the consumer to live independently.”

Raible said the EOC will handle care of the grounds at both sites.

May 13, 2006

Forest Press

Keystone Star Participants Recognized

The child care facilities in Warren and Forest Counties that participate in the Keystone STARTS program were recognized during the Week of the Young Child at the Provider Participation Dinner held at the Warren Area Elementary Center.

Keystone STARS is a voluntary program that recognizes Department of Public Welfare (DPW) regulated child care providers, including home providers and centers, who exceed state health and safety certification requirements. Keystone STARS is a quality rating system based on staffing qualifications, environment, and how a facility runs their business. Enrolled facilities earn a STAR One, Two, Three or Four based on levels of achievement. Each STAR designation has its own research-based performance standards or benchmarks that are linked to improving outcomes for children. This program was established to promote the improvement of the early learning environments.

Start with STARS participants in Warren and Forest Counties are JoAnn Gazdak, Lisa Jordan, Lucinda Benner, Pam Dickey, and Sandra Benedict. STAR 1 participants are Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Kid’s Choice Community Learning Center, Marina Yeager, Rhonda DeSimone, Rita Kelly, Susan Nielsen, Warren County YMCA Center, and First Presbyterian Church Day Care Center. STAR 2 participants include Henry Rouse Children’s Center and Russell United Methodist Church Day Care Center.

May 10, 2006

Forest Press

Provider Appreciation Day, May 12

EOC’s Early Care and Education Coalition urges parents and community members to honor and thank the people who care for our children on May 12, National Providers Appreciation Day.

Providers Appreciation Day is a special day to recognize child care providers, teachers and educators of young children everywhere. Providers Appreciation Day was started by a group of volunteers who saw the need to recognize the work and dedication of those who work with young children. The first even was held in 1996 and support for this annual day of recognition has been growing every since.

A recent nationwide study sponsored by the National Child Care Association shows that there are at least 2.8 million people who earn their money by teaching and caring for young children or by working in directly related jobs. While the child care profession is one of the most underpaid occupations in the country, *early childhood is the most critical developmental period for all children.*

Parents and community leaders are encouraged to show their appreciation of child care providers, **Head Start**, pre-K intermediate unit staff, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers on Friday, May 12, 2006. Need ideas of ways to honor the providers? Here is a list of suggestions: get together with other parents to create a surprise, send flowers, cards or a handwritten not of appreciation, bring breakfast or lunch for your provider and for the children, work with your child to create a special remembrance, or say THANK YOU.

May 3, 2006

Forest Press

Week of the Young Child Celebrated in Warren and Forest Counties

The Week of the Young Child celebration planned by **EOC's Early Care and Education Committee** was held the week of April 2-8, 2006. Activities included a workshop for parents of Pre-K children, free sundaes at McDonald's for children under 12, free cookies at Subways in Forest County, an Appreciation Dinner, the Children's Fun Fair, and Community Readers visiting Pre-K classrooms.

Community Readers volunteered to visit area Pre-K classrooms in Warren and Forest Counties to read and discuss the book *Inside Mouse, Outside Mouse* to the children. Many thanks go out to the 38 readers who visited approximately 50 classrooms.

Sue Kibbey, a Warren County School District Kindergarten teacher, provided the workshop for parents of Pre-K children to learn how to integrate learning into daily activities in the home using household items. Learning begins the day a child is born, and it is important to nurture them as they grow and develop. Research is showing that 90% of brain development occurs before a child enters school.

The Appreciation Dinner was held on Thursday, April 6 at the Warren Area Elementary School with 120 early care and education providers in attendance along with other community officials. The purpose of the evening was to recognize the importance of the

work that is done by the early care and education providers. They play a significant role in the lives of our children each day. Recognition was given to the providers in Warren and Forest Counties who participate in the Keystone STARS program. Keystone STARS is a quality rating system for providers based on staffing, environment, and how a facility runs their business.

A Children's Fun Fair was held on Saturday, April 8 at the Jefferson DeFrees Center as part of the Week of the Young Child celebration for Warren and Forest Counties. Area early educators and social service agencies provided many activities such as face painting, planting flower seeds, dancing with DJ Marty Loomis, finger printing, climbing on a fire truck, and visiting with the New Hope Assistance Dogs. Over 225 children attended the Fun Fair. It was a great opportunity for the young children in our community to take part in a variety of fun activities and for parents to learn about programs available in Warren and Forest Counties.

EOC's Early Care and Education Coalition would like to thank the area businesses, organizations, and clubs that made Week of the Young Child a huge success: Highmark, McDonald's, Subway of Marienville and Tionesta, Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Warren Public Library, Henry R. Rouse Children's Center, Forest-Warren Human Services Early Intervention, Forest-Warren LICC, **EOC's Head Start**, North Warren Presbyterian Day Care, Youngsville First United Methodist Preschool, Beacon Light, Achievement Center, Warren YMCA, Sue Kibbey, 4-H After School Forestry Program, WIC, Marty Loomis, Warren Fire Department, New Hope Assistance Dogs, Cooperative Extension, Don Mills Achievement Center, PA Department of Health, Warren County State Health Center, Grace United Methodist Preschool, Erie Shriner's Club, First Presbyterian Day Care, Ruth M. Smith Day Care, Warren City Police, South Street Early Learning Center, Warren Area Elementary Center, Whirley Industries, Nutrition Inc., Forest County Commissioners, Warren County Commissioners, Warren County Career Center, WNAE 1310 AM Radio Station, American Legion Post 135, Betts Industries, Ed Shults of Warren, Exchange Club, Huber Blacktop, IOOF #339, Superior Tire and Rubber, United Refining, Warren Pediatrics.

The 2007 Week of the Young Child is scheduled for April 22-28, 2007.

April 29, 2006

Warren Times Observer

The Week of the Young Child celebration planned by **EOC's Early Care and Education Committee** was held on April 2-8. Activities included a workshop for parents of pre-kindergarten children, free sundaes at McDonald's, an appreciation dinner, a children's fun fair, and community readers visiting pre-K classrooms.

Community readers volunteered to visit classrooms in Warren and Forest Counties to read and discuss the book “Inside Mouse, Outside Mouse” to the children. Thirty-eight readers visited approximately 50 classrooms.

Sue Kibbey, a Warren County School District kindergarten teacher, provided the workshop for parents of pre-K children to learn how to integrate learning into daily activities in the home using household items. Learning begins the day a child is born. Research is showing that 90 percent of brain development occurs before a child enters school.

The appreciation dinner was held April 6 at the Warren Area Elementary Center with 120 early care and education providers in attendance along with other community officials. The purpose of the evening was to recognize the importance of the work that is done by early care and education providers. They play a significant role in the lives of our children each day. Recognition was given to the providers in Warren and Forest Counties who participate in the Keystone STARS program. Keystone STARS is a quality rating system for providers based on staffing, environment, and how a facility runs their business.

A Children’s Fun Fair was held on Saturday, April 8 at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center as part of the Week of the Young Child Celebration for Warren and Forest Counties. Area early educators and social service agencies provided many activities such as face painting, planting flower seeds, dancing with disc jockey Marty Loomis, finger printing, climbing on a fire truck, and visiting with the New Hope Assistance Dogs. More than 225 children attended the fair. It was a great opportunity for the young children of our community to take part in a variety of fun activities and for parents to learn about programs available in Warren and Forest counties.

The following area businesses, organizations and clubs contributed: Highmark, McDonald’s, Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Warren Public Library, Henry R. Rouse Children’s Center, Forest-Warren Human Services Early Intervention, Forest –Warren LICC, **EOC’s Head Start**, North Warren Presbyterian Day Care, Youngsville First United Methodist Preschool, Beacon Light, Achievement Center, Warren YMCA, Sue Kibbey, 4-H After School Forestry Program, WIC, Marty Loomis, Warren Fire Department, New Hope Assistance Dogs, Warren Cooperative Extension, Don Mills Achievement Center, PA Department of Health, Warren County State Health Center, Grace United Methodist Pre-School, Erie Shriner’s Club, First Presbyterian Day Care, Ruth M. Smith Day Care Center, Warren City Police, South Street Early Learning Center Warren Area Elementary Center, Whirley Industries, Nutrition Inc., Forest County Commissioners, Warren County Commissioners, Warren County Career Center, WNAE 1310 AM Radio Station, American Legion Post 135, Betts Industries, Ed Shults of Warren, Exchange Club, Huber Black top, IOOF #339, Superior Tire & Rubber, United Refining, Warren Pediatric Associates.

The 2007 Week of the Young Child is scheduled for April 22- 28.

April 26, 2006

Forest Press

Learn to Save \$ With the Family Savings Account Program

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council office located on 1209 Pennsylvania Ave. West, Warren, PA.

The Family Savings Account Program is a community building initiative established for the purpose of promoting self-sufficiency for lower income Pennsylvanians through a matched savings program. Based on an approved plan, the matched savings can be used to help finance the purchase of a new home or home repair, pay for education expenses, start a small business or purchase a car for employment and/or education.

The Family Savings Program stimulates economic self-sufficiency by helping participants focus on long- and short-term financial skills as it encourages savings and asset development that empower individuals as well as economically strengthening communities in Pennsylvania.

Program participants save a minimum of \$10 a week for a one or two year period. Family Savings Account program will match the participant's savings dollar for dollar or 100%.

Program participants will attend four general workshops. Workshops will cover such topics as personal management training, budgeting and credit repair, loans and grants resource development, and personal financial planning i.e. savings and investment, insurance, wills and tax planning.

Enrollments in the Family Savings Account Program will be accepted through June 30, 2006 on a first come first served basis.

If interested in the Family Savings Account Program, please contact E.O.C. Community Services for eligibility requirements at 814-726-2400 x 3030.

April 5, 2006

Warren Times Observer

Meetings set for those starting businesses

"I am starting my own business. Now what do I do?"

For those who have always wanted to start their own business and for those who need help getting their small business to grow, a free course will be offered this spring.

For information, attend one of two meetings, from 6 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 18, and Tuesday, April 25, at the EOC Building, 1209 Pennsylvania Avenue West, second floor conference room.

Call 726-2400, ext. 3035 or email Sherman@wfcaa.org to register.

Classes will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. each Tuesday, May 2 through June 27, at the EOC building and will help entrepreneur hopefuls set realistic business and personal goals; develop a written business plan; understand the importance of record keeping, financial statements, bookkeeping, marketing and more; gain access to small loans, marketing assistance and other business support services; and receive ongoing assistance as the business grows.

April 1, 2006

Warren Times Observer

Celebrate Week of the Young Child, April 2-8

The Warren County Commissioners and the Forest County Commissioners have joined forces with EOC's Warren –Forest Early Care and Education Coalition and have signed a proclamation declaring April 2-8 Week of the Young Child. The purpose of the Week of the Young Child is to recognize the needs of young children and thank educators and child care providers that are involved in building better futures for the children of our community. Week of the Young Child is celebrated across the country by hundreds of organizations working to improve opportunities for all young children.

A wide variety of activities are planned for the Week of the Child in Warren and Forest Counties:

Tuesday, April 4 – Parent Workshop; Early Learning Begins at Home
Sue Kibbey, Presenter, 6:00 – 8:00, Slater Room of the Warren Public Library

A free school readiness workshop will be offered to explain why early learning is important and provide information and examples of how parents can work with young children in their daily routines.

Wednesday, April 5 – Free Sundaes at McDonald's for children under 12.
Free cookies at Subway of Marienville and Tionesta for children under 12.

Thursday, April 6 – Appreciation Dinner.

A dinner will be held at the Warren Area Elementary Center for all early care and education providers and kindergarten teachers in Warren and Forest Counties to recognize the significant role they play in the lives of the children of our community. Early care facilities that participate in Keystone STARS will be recognized. Local businesses that support the activities of the Warren-Forest Early Care and Education programs, including Week of the Young Child, will be honored at the dinner as well.

Sunday, April 8 – Children’s Fun Fair, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., Jefferson DeFrees Family Center – Free and open to the public.

A Children’s Fun Fair will include hands-on activities, New Hope Assistance dogs, DJ Mary Loomis, Tae Kwon Do demonstration, SPARK activities by the YMCA staff, fire truck tours, fingerprint and photo identification kits, art activities, gift bags and more. It is a great day for families to come out and enjoy an afternoon of activities and fun for the children.

Monday – Friday, April 3 – 7 – Community Readers

Community readers will visit 40 Warren and Forest child care centers, Head Start classrooms, kindergartens, IU Pre-K classrooms, and family child care homes to read to children. At each site, the book *Inside Mouse, Outside Mouse* will be read and a copy of the book will be donated to the site. The readers include business owners, directors of agencies, library directors, school principals, and many more!

Young children and their families depend on quality education and care, which help children get a great start, and bring lasting benefits for our society as a whole. Week of the Young Child is a time to recognize the people, programs, and policies that are helping to build better futures for all children.

Come out and enjoy the celebration of the children of our community and the early care and education providers by attending the events scheduled for Week of the Young Child!

Week of the Young Child activities are made possible by contributions and support from: Highmark, Cooperative extension Better Kid Care, Betts Industries, United Refining, Ed Shults of Warren, Huber Blacktop, Exchange Club, Warren Pediatrics, Superior Tire, IOOF #339, American Legion, McDonald’s, Warren County School District, Warren County Commissioners, and the Forest County Commissioners, **Warren-Forest EOC**, and **Warren-Forest Early Care and Education Coalition**.

March 24, 2006

Brian Ferry
Warren Times Observer

Savings plan through EOC helps families

Hopefully, Randy Ishman will be able to negotiate his unsafe stairs for a few more weeks.

Ishman is only the second graduate of the **Warren Forest Economic Opportunity Council's Family Savings Account Program**.

The program, in its second year, encourages people to save money toward a goal. If the participant reaches that goal, EOC will match the saved amount dollar for dollar. "When they reach the savings goal we'll match what the goal was one hundred percent," **Community Services Director Patricia Lobdell** said. The maximum match is \$2,000.

Participants may save to buy a home or a car, make home improvements, pay for education, or open a business.

Ishman heard about the program and decided to give it a try.

He decided his biggest need was a new stairway in his house. The top and bottom steps are about half as high as the rest of the steps, he said.

"I don't know how many times I've almost killed myself on that staircase," he said.

"Replacing them will include removing steps, stringers, kickboards and all," he said, adding that expects materials and construction to cost approximately \$2,000.

Following program guidelines, Ishman saved \$40 each month for two years. Ten dollars a week is the minimum amount and two years is the maximum term allowed under the program. The EOC gets statements and reports and always follows up if something isn't right.

"They let you know when you miss a payment," Ishman said. "Nobody's perfect."

Lobdell agrees, but for the purposes of the program, all payments must be made promptly.

Savings wasn't always easy for Ishman. His other expenses were winning the race with his income.

"There were times I was flat broke," he admitted.

But he stuck with the program. After several weeks of putting away the required amount as soon as he got his paycheck, Ishman said he didn't notice so much.

Most of the time, "it was pretty easy to do," he said.

Not always. His dedication was tested.

“That account looked pretty juicy at times,” he said. “I could have dived in to that at any time, but I decided I was going to make it. If you jump on that savings account for any reason, it’s over.”

“When his car broke down, he needed a replacement. But he didn’t dip into the account. “I left it there and found another way to get the car,” Ishman said.

He had another temptation toward the end of the second year. A few weeks ago, in the depths of winter, Ishman’s furnace blew up into what he describes as a “pile of slag.” The boiler is still covered by the warranty, he said, but the company that made it and gave the guarantee is no longer around.

He has temporarily solved that problem and the EOC is working to help him find a long-term solution.

Armida McCall is a case manager for the program and it’s her job, among other things, to help when the hard times hit. “They do have some support once they’re in the program,” she said. If problems do come, there may be other ways around.”

McCall said participants in the program may, at the end of the first year, change their goal.

Ishman didn’t do that, though he had some good options.

Sticking to the original play was worth it and the money has already been put to its use. “I’m going to get the materials today,” he said. “I hate that stairway.”

Lobdell is pleased, too.

“I am very excited to have someone complete the program,” Lobdell said.

Some find it too difficult. With two graduates and nine still in the program, more people gave up than kept on. “We had people who started saving and then pulled out for one reason or another,” Lobdell said.

But she’s looking for more folks who want to try.

“We have 17 openings left for people to enroll until the end of June,” Lobdell said. “We’re hoping to fill all the spots—otherwise that money goes back to the state.”

There are income and asset restrictions for joining the program. Lobdell said the income restrictions are at a higher level than those of most other assistance programs. There are no age limitations, students whose families fall within the guidelines may participate.

Lobdell hopes that students will take advantage of the program in order to help pay for further education.

In addition to gaining practice with savings, the program requires participants to attend four economic workshops and an individual budget session.

“It was great,” Ishman said. “I learned a great deal about finances.”

The next financial literacy workshop, Know Your Credit, will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, March 30. It is open to the public as well as participants in the program. Lobdell asks that interested people pre-register by calling 726-2400 ext. 3030.

In addition to receiving the matching funds, Ishman received a certification from the EOC. But the lessons he learned may be the most valuable.

“It teaches financial responsibility,” he said. Although he was no longer required to contribute to the savings, “I did put some in this month, and I’m probably going to continue to save.”

That’s the idea. “The program helps people build good savings habits,” McCall said.

And it gets Ishman’s stamp of approval. “Join the program,” he said. “It’s a good program and you save money.”

March 16, 2006

Dean Wells
Warren Times Observer

Fund aids county food program

Warren County has been awarded \$13,954 in federal funds under the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program.

The funds will be used to supplement current programs in the county.

The national board is chaired by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and consists of representatives from the Salvation Army, American Red Cross, United Jewish Communities, Catholic Charities, USA, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and the United Way of America.

A local board will determine how to divvy up the funds in the county. The board is chaired by **Robert Raible**, of the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council**.

Raible said that the Economic Opportunity Council will use its funding for energy assistance. The Salvation Army will use its funds for rental assistance or eviction prevention. The St. Joseph's Soup Kitchen and First Presbyterian Food Program will use funds toward their respective programs.

According to Major Thomas Applin, the Salvation Army uses its funds to assess individuals "who have the possibility of being evicted from their homes or individuals who are burned out of their homes."

A small portion of the Salvation Army's funds goes to help transients who are traveling through the area and find themselves stranded in Warren County.

"Basically we use those funds when we get them until they're gone," Applin said. "It's a case of individuals coming in and applying for the funds through a caseworker. There are specific guidelines that we have to follow regarding the use of that money and how we disperse it."

March 11, 2006

Brian Ferry
Warren Times Observer

New funding will help snuff smoking

The Warren County Tobacco Free Coalition is working to live up to its name.

The group's mission statement is "to reduce and eliminate tobacco use by promoting tobacco-free lifestyles."

Sandy Setilli is the tobacco program coordinator for the American Lung Association. She is also the primary contractor for the tobacco settlement funds. Those funds amount to \$107,000 for Warren County this year.

The money allows Setilli to contract with Human Services, the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council**, and a number of law enforcement, education, and health organizations, as well as individuals in the community.

"Our focus right now is clean indoor air," she said.

The coalition wouldn't object to sweeping changes at the state level. "We would love to see new or stronger clean indoor air laws and would love to see all of our restaurants and workplaces and businesses become smoke free," Setilli said.

But coalition members are not satisfied with lobbying far-away legislators. They want to push for change at home, too.

“We’re not working on that at the local level because we feel if we can educate people to the dangers of secondhand smoke, we may get some of these places to go smoke free,” she said.

According to Lung Association and coalition reports, passive smoke contains at least 40 cancer-causing chemicals and represents a serious hazard for non-smokers, especially children.

“Passive smoking is a Group A carcinogen comparable to the most potent cancer-causing agents such as benzene, asbestos, arsenic and vinyl chloride,” a federal Environmental Protection Agency report states.

Setilli’s position with the Lung Association puts her in position to see the effects of secondhand smoke. “We talk to people every day who have lung cancer but have never smoked,” she said.

Betsy Miller is the director of the drug and alcohol program at Human Services. She is also secretary of the coalition.

“Our most recent thing was working with the municipalities to try to orchestrate change in smoke-free workplace policy,” she said. “We had six municipalities that either updated their policies or adopted brand new smoke-free workplace policies.”

“That covers a lot of people,” Setilli said.

And the results keep growing. “Since then we’ve had some bingo halls go smoke free,” she said, and “more restaurants in Warren and Forest counties are smoke free than a year ago.”

Students and younger children represent a large portion of the coalition’s target area.

“We’re doing programs in the schools, day care, **Head Start**,” Setilli said. “There is no age limit. From a very, very early age—from the time they’re old enough to color the no-smoking symbol—right on through programs at the senior centers.”

“We provide cessation programs,” Setilli said. “We talk to current smokers. We try to educate them and give them the tools to help them quit.”

The coalition’s next cessation program is scheduled for March 21, at the Warren County YMCA.

The coalition is making progress, but its efforts have been scaled back this year. “We’re very concerned about our funding,” Setilli said.

“This year, in Warren County, we initially received \$150,000,” she said. “But the governor cut our funding from 12 percent to 9 percent. Now we are at about \$107,000.

“We have made so much progress in Warren and Forest counties,” she said. “It would really be a shame to see that “money go away.”

The coalition has numbers to back up its claims to success.

“The sale rate of tobacco to minors has dropped drastically,” she said. From 2001 to 2004, the sale rate of tobacco to minors dropped from 26 percent to 7 percent.

The number of citations issued during tobacco sales compliance checks has also dropped.

The decrease in funding has caused the coalition to reduce its number of radio ads and eliminate its billboard program.

“We had some of our students that are involved do educational spots for us,” she said. “We’ve had to cut those in half because of the funding.”

February 16, 2006

Victoria Barone
Warren Times Observer

Cold nights ahead? Money for heating assistance dwindling

While the cost of home heating rises, money for heating assistance programs generally has not, creating a difficult situation at best and a worse one ahead, according to **Robert Raible, director of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC)**.

This year’s federal budget had reduced funds for LIHEAP, which provides financial assistance to low-income seniors and families. Pennsylvania recently put additional money into the state’s heating assistance program in response to high gas bills. “They saw that the need was so great and that the federal government was not coming through with enough” to even catch up from last winter’s costs, Raible said.

“We’ve had some more people apply (for assistance), but the biggest things that we’re seeing is the increase in our bills, and our money has stayed consistent, so...our money is just about gone,” Raible said.

If it had been a typical winter, instead of substantially warmer one, Raible added, EOC’s heating assistance funds would have been depleted by now. “I think February’s going to

hit us hard,” he said. “We can access the Neighbor for Neighbor program, but that has specific guidelines for it.”

To qualify, a recipient of the Neighbor for Neighbor program must be at least 55 year old or have someone in the household with a medical situation, documented by a physician, that qualifies.

He also noted that President Bush plans to cut funding in 2007 to a federal home weatherization program.

Is there any light at the end of the tunnel? “Actually, it’s getting darker, because a new state law went into effect last year,” Raible said.

People whose income falls below 250 percent of the poverty line cannot have their heat shut off for non-payment during the winter months. But once that defined period is over, the heat can be shut off for falling behind with payments. “What’s going to happen once they’re allowed to shut those people off?” Raible asked.

In addition to paying the amount in arrears, a customer must pay the current bill, a reconnection fee and possibly a security deposit. For people who couldn’t even keep up with a regular payment, finding all of that money will be a serious challenge, according to Raible. “We’re going to have people without service all summer and in September, with the first cold spell, it will be a mess,” he said.

Raible went on to say that one of the problems is that “we can’t help anyone unless we can ensure utility continuation. We can’t pay unless we can be sure they’re not going to be shut off. People come to us with these large bills, and we can’t help them.”

February 1, 2006

Forest Press

Focus on Forest’s Future, Inc. Conducts Long-Term Sustainability Plan

Focus on Forest’s Future, Inc. (FFC) has recently conducted a long-term financial sustainability plan to assist in diversifying key community leaders involved with the planning process, establish a financial future, and to move closer toward accomplishing the mission, “Enhancing the Quality of Life for All Children and Families.”

FFF was formed in 1995 as a result of the “Family Service System Reform” and the “Communities that Care” Initiatives. It is in its tenth year as a recipient of the FSSR grant monies. Since its inception, FFF has been selected as a **Head Start** State Collaboration pilot county, Communities that Care site, State Health Improvement Plan partner, a member of the Western Pennsylvania Partnership, and most recently a Children’s Trust Fund recipient.

The Community Collaboration Board, which is comprised of approximately 130 community members, meets bi-annually. Initially, 17 individuals were chosen to serve on the FF Board. Recently, the existing FFF Advisory Board has evolved into a Non-Profit Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is comprised of a retired State Health Nurse, Director of the Industrial Development Corporation, Administrator of Forest County Children & Youth Services, Director of the Forest County Department of Public Welfare, Forest County Schools Superintendent, Forest County School Guidance Counselor, **Childcare School Readiness Coalition**, Forest County Clergy, Forest County Commissioner, Forest County Law Enforcement, six Forest County youth, and representatives of the community.

As a result of this transition, the board has assumed more responsibility and has become more vested in the mission, “Enhance the Quality of Life for Forest County Children and Families.” Because FFF has retained the majority of original board members, a continuity of experience has been beneficial to our success in identifying gaps and reforming the county service system.

As a result of FFF evolving from under a public non-profit entity under the umbrella of County government to a stand-alone non-profit organization, it has been necessary for FFF to secure an assortment of insurances ranging from Director’s and Officer’s Insurance to Program Liability Insurance. It was also necessary to formalize the relationship between County government and FFF as two distinct legal entities. The relationship needed to define the disposition of cash and assets held by the County on behalf of the FFF. A framework for the cooperative joint venture as partners working on behalf of our community’s children and families had to be developed.

Prior to July 1, 2004, the Executive Director and Administrative Assistant were engaged as independent contractors; as of July 2004, they became employees. In response to the change from contractors to employees, the Executive Board of the Board of Directors (Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary) has developed policies and procedures to govern employee practices. The Non-Profit Executive Board has facilitated much of the process involved with becoming a non-profit board.

The importance of the Countywide Board, the Board of Directors, and the Executive Committee cannot be minimized, as they have been an integral part of our success. Also crucial to the success of FFF’s ability to re-structure itself was a solid, professional relationship with local government. The evolution of FFF from a public to a private non-profit entity helps to strategically position the organization such that it might benefit from private contributions, foundation resources as well as governmental funds, enhancing future sustainability. During the process, FFF has taken care in preserving the collaborative “roots” which help to provide local ownership, credibility and support.

2005

December 13, 2005

Warren Times Observer
Kristin Smith

**EOC provides skills for financial security
Financial literacy workshop slated**

Saving up for a future goal may seem like an impossible dream to someone who is up to their eyeballs in bills.

But it is possible, according to the **Warren-Forest County Economic Opportunity Council (EOC)**. You just need the right skills.

The EOC, in partnership with Northwest Savings Bank, is holding a series of workshops to show people how to get on track when it comes to their finances.

It's called "financial literacy." The first workshop, Dec. 15 from 6-8 p.m. at the EOC, 1209 Pennsylvania Ave. W., will cover a range of subjects" how to select a bank, choosing and keeping a checking account, how to make a credit card work for you, banking services, why you should save and your rights as a consumer. The workshops are open to the public and people are asked to reserve a spot in advance by calling the EOC at 726-2400 ext. 3030.

The workshops are provided as part of the Family Savings Account Program—a program that **EOC community services director Patricia Lobdell** calls "the best deal in town."

The program matches dollar for dollar what an individual invests—up to \$1,000 a year. Participants must meet income eligibility requirements. And it's not just for low-income families. People who earn a moderate income can also qualify.

To open a savings account, the individual must have a goal to achieve through the savings account. Approved goals are homeownership, post-secondary education, microenterprise, and purchase of a car.

The goal of the Family Savings Account program is to encourage self-sufficiency, encourage regular savings and asset development. Family Savings Account participants are required to attend financial literacy workshops.

"It makes people not so intimidated," said Lobdell of the program.

“For people who don’t know the ins and outs, there’s someone there guide them,” she added.

Lobdell describes the program as a learning process where a person can learn the importance of budgeting and saving money toward something.

EOC Community service case manager Armida McCall said the program can build someone’s self-esteem as they see how it is possible to save and “see how it could make their life better.”

Lobdell said the Family Savings Account is one of several program available at EOC that can work in conjunction with each other to help someone on the “road to self-sufficiency.”

People can apply for an account by setting up an appointment with McCall to determine their eligibility. They must fill out an application.

Students, parents, grandparents, and prison inmates, and individuals wanting to start a business or own a home are all people who can enroll if they meet income and asset eligibility. June 30 is the deadline to apply for an account, but there are limited slots available.

While Lobdell acknowledges there is sometimes a negative stigma attached to assistance programs, this is one that requires a personal commitment and a program “people shouldn’t embarrassed to sign up for.”

November 2, 2005

Victoria Barone
Warren Times Observer

Senior citizens getting hot over prospects of being cold this winter

After listening to a presentation by the **Warren Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC)** on rising utility costs, Marvin Wagner shook his head.

“In a country as rich as this is supposed to be, why are our elderly and our children going cold and hungry?” he asked.

Community service case managers Donna Swan and Armida McCall discussed rising utility costs with the senior citizens and also explained programs designed to assist those who qualify, during a visit to the Warren Senior Community Center.

Many of those listening were dissatisfied with the rules for qualification. “I feel that at this point in my life, I shouldn’t have to cold, and I am,” Donna Hartman said. “I’m not poor and I’m not rich, so I qualify for nothing.”

On Tuesday, Pennsylvania’s National Fuel Gas customers were hit with a 22.8 percent increase in fuel costs. The quarterly rate increase is only the latest in a series of rate hikes. The price of natural gas is now \$16.99 per thousand cubic feet, a record high. Additionally, Pennsylvania has some of the most lenient laws in the nation in terms of shutting off natural gas customers.

Gov. Ed Rendell is one of 28 state governors who have asked Congress to increase funding for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP is one of the programs that help qualified residents pay their winter heating bills. There are also plans designed to assist with electric bills, such as First Energy’s WARM program, which provides numerous tips for conserving energy. Examples are lowering water heating thermostats to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, using cold water when possible for laundry, setting refrigerator temperatures from 38 to 40 degrees and turning off appliances when not in use.

Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania has Universal Service Programs designed to help make monthly payments more affordable. The federal Family Savings Account Program helps low income families and individuals through a matched savings program. And there are many others as well. But many believe that the programs do not address the needs of those in the middle income range.

As one man in the audience put it, “We are not poor enough.”

But money is tight enough to make the high utility bills a real difficulty, according to a number of seniors. They have responded by doing what they can to lower costs, like installing new windows, new furnaces, and using energy conserving tactics.

I haven’t turned down the heat yet, but if it gets really bad, I will,” Elsie Bosko said. Wagner had some additional thoughts on the programs designed to assist those in certain income brackets. “I think it’s a vicious circle,” he added. “The taxpayers are paying for it...And when you look at the profits the oil and gas companies are making, it’s ridiculous.”

June 30, 2005

Kristin Smith
Warren Times Observer

**EOC looks to help families
Transitional housing proposed to follow stays at A Safe Place**

Victims of domestic violence may soon have another step of assistance available so independence will come a bit more easily.

Currently in Warren County when families leave abusive situations, A Safe Place provides emergency shelter for 90 days.

But once that time expires, some families aren't quite ready to survive on their own for a myriad of reasons, such as lack of finances.

Under the existing lack of options available in the county, families sometimes go back to the unhealthy environment that they left in the first place.

"The options for these women and families now are very limited," said **Bob Raible**, director of the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC)**.

The agency is trying to change that.

The EOC is working to secure funding that will provide transitional housing to families who need help getting back on their feet once they leave the shelter at A Safe Place.

Raible estimates that last year 12 to 15 families in the Warren County area could have benefited from this type of housing.

The planned transitional housing will consist of four apartments at two different locations. Three of the units will have two bedrooms and a fourth will have three bedrooms. The EOC plans to renovate a property it owns on Pennsylvania Avenue West and to purchase and renovate another property for the project.

A case manager would assist the families in the transitional housing in resolving issues so that they will be able to move into permanent housing. The transitional housing would be available to families referred to by A Safe Place for up to 24 months.

"This would be the first transitional housing project of this nature," Raible said.

"The EOC is currently waiting on state and federal grants before moving ahead with the project. It has applied for a three-year \$318,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and has been promised \$109,750 in a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

Raible hopes to have secured the funding needed by December and to have the transitional housing available by July 2006.

The transitional housing, according to Raible, will be a next level of assistance after a Safe Place.

“A Safe Place does a fantastic job. (The EOC will) build on what they’ve done and take it to the next step.”

June 25, 2005

Jeff Huber
Warren Times Observer

Warren Anthems opening closer

Opening day for Warren Anthems is drawing closer.

After months of construction the housing complex, designed for persons suffering from chronic mental illness, will most likely open in July, according to executive director of the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council Robert Raible**.

“We are way ahead of schedule,” said Raible on the project, which was originally scheduled for completion in October. “We are at least three months, if not longer, ahead of schedule.”

The exact date of Warren Anthem’s launch currently depends on the outcome of a punch-out meeting that will occur between the facility’s architect, general contractors, and a representative from Housing and Urban Development on June 27. On that date the meeting’s participants will determine a list of all final improvements and inspections that need to be performed on the facility.

“We’re hoping not too long after the beginning of July 9 (to open), but until we go through the punch-out and get a punch-out list, we’re not really sure of an exact date,” explained Raible. “So we’re hoping for a very small list so we can get things accomplished quickly.”

Once it opens, Warren Anthems will become the only independent living facility for persons suffering from chronic mental illness in the county. The facility is the joint effort of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council and Housing and Development Services (HANDS). Both are non-profit organizations centered in northwestern Pennsylvania.

HANDS is currently reviewing submitted applications for housing at Warren Anthems. According to Raible, as of Friday, tenants have already been assigned to four of the facility’s eight apartments.

Applications are still being accepted.

Applicants must earn certain income levels to be eligible for housing. For one person to live at Warren Anthems, their income must be no more than \$17,350. For two persons,

their income must be no greater than \$19,800. For three persons, the cut-off is \$22,300, and for four, it's \$24,750.

Warren Anthems will feature six one-bedroom and two two-bedroom homes. As a result of the hill on which it was built, Warren Anthems is comprised of two rows of four homes. Each row contains its own parking lot. Also as a result of the two levels, no stairs are needed to help residents access their homes.

“One of the major disadvantages of the building site was the hillside location but that actually has worked in favor of making the facility completely handicap accessible,” noted Raible. “It’s close to amenities, it’s close to the grocery store, it’s close to the bus route, but we like the fact that it’s completely accessible.

Unlike the hillside, however, Warren Anthems has not been able to resolve its issues with Northwest Human Development. Northwest Human Development is supposed to help supervise the new facility but, with the agency’s future uncertain, its involvement with Warren Anthems has become uncertain.

For more information on Warren Anthems or to schedule an application appointment call Randy Danielson at (800) 284-4411 ext. 16 or Sue Clark at (814) 459-1047 ext 22. They are available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday.

June 16, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Coalition honors Open Court Reading

The Warren/Forest EOC Child Care/School Readiness Coalition has honored Open Court Reading Pre-K with the first-ever Family Friendly Everybody Wins Award.

The award was given in appreciation for SRA/McGraw-Hills’ support of early care and education in the Warren-Forest community when Open Court Reading Pre-K was implemented in all of the area day care centers, thanks to an Early Care in Education grant.

“Open Court Reading is used in the local district’s elementary schools, and this will help our children get an early start in reading,” **Tish Montgomery, director of the Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition.** “SRA was very generous, cooperative, and helpful in getting the program started in our preschools, and we have been truly thankful.

SRA/McGraw-Hill Open Court Reading is a comprehensive reading and language arts program for Pre-K through Grade 6.

“We thank the Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition for this honor. We strive to make our customers happy, and this is the best testament that we are meeting that goal,” said Sue Andrews, marketing manager for Open Court Reading. “We also applaud the coalition’s efforts to educate young children. We share the belief that starting as early as preschool helps teach children the skills needed to succeed in life.”

May 24, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Child care, education advocates honored

The EOC’s **Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition**, our region early care and education committee, announces its 2005 Everybody Wins Coalition Special Recognition Awards, bestowed in honor of the recipients’ “dedication to collaboration and partnerships and their willingness to go past the call of duty to ensure that the people in our community who care for our children and informed, educated, and included.”

Cindy Yeagle, executive director of the Forest County Assistance Office.

“Cindy Yeagle has served on almost every committee that we have formed this year, and when she has not served in person, she is always ready to help me vet committee recommendations, and shape projects. In her work, she shows herself to be a child advocate who moves in ways that we do not always see,” said **Tish Montgomery, coalition project coordinator and the EOC’s child care information services director.**

Kelly Kelley, the EOC’s child care information services specialist.

“Kelly does what she does for the kids and families of our community because she cares. She has assumed the burden so many times in so many of our projects. She is an awesomely talented graphic who has enabled our public communications. I honestly do not know what this Coalition would do without her generous talents and incredible giving support,” Montgomery stated.

The Warren Neighborhood Partnership and its members and supporters Ann Buerkle, Susan Anderson, Kelly Kelley, Sue Kibbey, Laurie Meyers, Pam Nassman, Wendy Wilcox, Kathy Hurst, Linda Gilson, Suzanne Painter, Lisa Steffy, and Lorraine Smith.

Montgomery said, “This partnership has brought to us a pre-k assessment document, our school readiness checklist, and the training that goes along with that. They get things done! They meet on a regular basis and directly address and answer community needs. They bring us projects and good works. This is a caring and compassionate collection of early caregivers and educators.”

The 2005 Coalition Everybody Wins Appreciation Awards, “in honor of the recipients’ profound willingness to provide and advance community awareness of child care and school readiness issues by active participation and leadership.” The recipients are:

Duane Vicini, Forest Area School District Superintendent;

Susan Anderson, Associate Executive Director, Jefferson DeFrees Family Center; and

Rosemarie Green, Warren County School District Supervisor of Federal Programs.

“These people are our concerned and dedicated stakeholders. They believe in quality, seamless, early education and care, and they work hard to promote our efforts. We are honored and grateful for their dedication,” said Montgomery.

The 2005 Everybody Wins Child Care/School Readiness Partnership Awards, “in honor of the recipients’ profound commitment to support quality child care and school readiness in our community.”

Warren County School District; Warren County Cooperative Extension, Better Kid Care; and the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center.

“These agencies are incredibly generous with their space, resources, staff, and more. They understand resource sharing. They are incredible partners, and we are so pleased to be able to honor them,” said Montgomery.

In addition to the formal awards, the coalition also recognized its sponsoring organization, the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council**, for “its four years of patient, reliable, and steady support.” The EOC is the Coalition’s lead agency, a role it accepted in 2001 and has worked to carry out since that launch year.

The coalition also honored **Head Start** for its 40th anniversary, Kids’ Choice Learning Center in Marienville for its launch year, and the Rouse Children’s Center for its 10-year anniversary.

The Rev. Dr. David Leininger, pastor of the Warren First Presbyterian Church, and John Bowler, Warren Health and Human Services, were awarded the Coalition “Quill Awards” for “Their editing, proofing, and polishing” of all coalition documents and press releases.

Montgomery said that the children and working families of Warren and Forest Counties are “the true benefactors of the work of these people and agencies. With help and support from these significant stakeholders, we are entering our 5th year of service with enthusiasm and a series of goals and tasks that will positively impact our quality of life, our workforce, and our efforts to promote seamless education.”

April 20, 2005

Forest Press

Coalition Honors Businesses For Family Friendly Practices

“We believe that by working together we can make changes, lift awareness about services, and help families and child care providers foster school readiness,” is the message the **EOC’s Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** delivered to the business community during the week of the Young Child, according to **Tish Montgomery, the EOC’s Warren-Forest Child Care Information services director and Coalition member.**

In partnership with the Warren-Forest Economic Opportunity Council and the Forest Industrial Development Corporation, Forest, Warren, regional and national businesses that have “informed” and “supported” the Coalition’s work since its inception four years ago were given the 2005 Family Friendly—Everybody Wins—Business Awards.

Montgomery said that when quality child care is readily available and affordable, the employee and the employer win.

The Coalition’s focus on “community awareness of family needs in terms of child care and school readiness has been so significantly supported by those businesses,” said Ms. Montgomery. “Our motto, ‘With Quality Child Care, Everybody Wins,’ is truly understood by so many of our local employers. So many of them have gone out of their way to open doors, to offer collaboration, to partner, and to help us achieve our goals and tasks.”

“Providing this Coalition with the resources they need to help us get our kids ready for school is a win-win,” explained **Robert Raible, Executive Director of the EOC.** “Studies show that investments in early care can really positively impact a community’s overall quality of life. Paybacks are incredibly beneficial and end up saving taxpayers money—as well as enriching children’s lives.”

The Coalition recently completed a review of projects, plans, and accomplishments. “In looking over all that we have worked toward these past years, we came to realize that our employers have really stepped up to the plate. They are interested in helping us address family and child needs, and we are so grateful for that,” said Kathy Hurst, Russell Day Care Center director and Coalition member. “Community support for school readiness is fundamental to our projects and work.”

Mrs. Hurst said that in addition to the honored businesses, many non-profit organizations, the school districts, and local and regional agencies have supported the Coalition efforts.

A representative of the IDC attended the Sunday, April 3 Week of the Young Child kick-off event at the Kids' Choice Learning Center to present the awards. Commissioner James Parrett attended to read the official Week of the Young Child proclamation. Kids' Choice and Choice Enterprises, Inc. supplied refreshments and hands-on activities for children. Businesses that were not present will receive mailed certifications.

The following for-profit Forest County businesses received their first-ever Family Friendly EVERYBODY WINS Business Awards:

The Forest Press
Snyder Memorial Health Care System
The Bucktail Restaurant
The Kelly Hotel
Baughman's Market
Mark Kingston Landscaping

Denise Storer, director of the Kids' Choice Learning Center in Marienville and Coalition member, said that in addition to for-profit businesses, many Forest County agencies and organizations helped during the Week of the Young Child Celebrations. She said that the Forest County Assistance Office, Forest Area School District, the Highmark Foundation, the **EOC and EOC's Child Care Information Services**, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Head Start, the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Focus on Forest's Future, and the Forest County Commissioners "all helped support our work, and we are very appreciative."

In addition to the kick-off, the week was marked with a series of celebrity readers who visited area child care centers and homes, as well as classrooms and read to children Monday—Friday. On Friday, April 8, Forest county early educators and child care providers were treated to a complimentary dinner and presentation by Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary Harriet Dichter, director of the Office of Child Development.

"We are grateful to the employers and agencies of Forest County for helping us make this year's Week of the Young Child a true celebration," said Mrs. Montgomery.

April 15, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Coalition honors businesses for family friendly practices

"If you think supporting child care means starting an on-site day care, think again," is the message of the **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** delivered to the business community during the Week of the Young Child, according to **Tish Montgomery, the EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care Information Services director and coalition member.**

In partnership with the **Warren-Forest Economic Opportunity Council** and the Warren County Chamber of Business & Industry, Warren, Forest, regional and national businesses that have “informed and supported” the Coalition’s work since its inception four years ago were given the “2005 Family Friendly—Everybody Wins!” business awards.

“New on-site child care isn’t our goal,” Montgomery explained. “we simply believe that by working together we can make changes, lift awareness about services, and help families and child care providers foster school readiness.” She said that when quality child care is readily available and affordable, the employee and the employer win.

The coalition’s focus on “community awareness of family needs in terms of child care and school readiness has been so significantly supported by these businesses,” said Montgomery. “Our motto, ‘With Quality Child Care, Everybody Wins,’ is truly understood by so many of our local employers. So many of them have gone out of their way to open doors, to offer collaborations, to partner, and to help us achieve our goals and tasks.”

“Providing this coalition with the resources they need to help us get our kids ready for school is a win-win,” explained **Robert Raible, executive director of the EOC**. “Studies show that investments in early care can really positively impact a community’s overall quality of life. Paybacks are incredibly beneficial and end up saving taxpayers’ money—as well as enriching children’s lives.”

Montgomery explained, “When we began our work, for example, *The Warren Times Observer* helped us by donating a full page of space. Last year, Osram Sylvania helped us fund a training collaborative committee that has helped us combine training resources for early education teachers and child care providers. Those are only two examples of the kind of support we have received from our business community.”

The coalition recently completed a review of projects, plans and past accomplishments. “In looking over all that we have worked toward these past few years, we came to realize that our employers have really stepped up to the plate. They are interested in helping us address family and child needs, and we’re so grateful for that,” said Kathy Hurst, Russell Day Care Center director and coalition member. “Community support for school readiness is fundamental to our projects and work.”

Hurst said that in addition to the honored businesses, many non-profit organizations, the school districts, and local and regional agencies have also supported coalition efforts.

Raible and James Decker of the WCCBI presented representatives from the Family Friendly businesses were presented their awards on Sunday, April 3, at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Main Street, Warren, supplied refreshments. Businesses that were not present will receive mailed certificates.

The following for-profit businesses for its first-ever Family Friendly Everybody Winds business awards:

Forest County: The Forest Press, Snyder Memorial Health Care System, The Bucktail Restaurant, the Kelly Hotel, Baughman's Market, Tionesta Grocery, Mark Kingston Landscaping.

Warren County: Times Observer, PNC Bank, Northwest Savings, Osram Sylvania, The Warren Mall, McDonalds Restaurant, Catering Plus, The Warren Holiday Inn, The Valley Voice, Steppin' Out, The Guide, Sturdevant Signs, Thorne's Bi-Lo, Quality Markets, Borger and Horsley, Kinzua Broadcasting Company, The House of Printing, Carter Communications, Heaven Sent Flowers & Gifts, Blair Corporation, Nutrition, Inc., Burger King, Dairy Queen, Whirley Industries, Waldenbooks, Wendy's, State Farm – Mark Phillips, Mark Evans, Value Home Center, Monroe Muffler and Brakes, Little Caesar's Pizza, Mark Loomis - Bubble Gum DJ, PNC Bank, New Hope Service Dogs.

Regional: Star 104, KDKA 1020. WKSN, WPSB-FM, 90.1, WLMI-FM, The Clarion News, The Oil City Derrick, WestPA.net, All Sound Recording.

National: McGraw Hill, Scholastic Books.

April 6, 2005

Forest Press

Provider Appreciation Dinner

The WOYC committee announces that there are 10 open community seats for the 2005 Provider Appreciation Dinner at Russell Elementary from 6 – 8 p.m. on Friday, April 8. People who work and care for our community's children—including parents and grandparents, as well as those who watch children on a regular basis for working parents—are cordially invited to call the CCIS office at 726-1361 by noon, Monday, April 4, to reserve a seat. The complimentary dinner includes a speech by Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary Harriet Dichter, director of the Office of Child Development.

April 1, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Providers appreciation

The WOYC committee announces that there are 10 open community seats for the 2005 Provider Appreciation Dinner at Russell Elementary from 6 – 8 p.m. on Friday, April 8. People who work and care for our community's children—including parents and

grandparents, as well as those who watch children on a regular basis for working parents—are cordially invited to call the **CCIS** office at 726-1361 by noon, Monday, April 4, to reserve a seat. The complimentary dinner includes a speech by Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary Harriet Dichter, director of the Office of Child Development.

March 31, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Ice Cream Bonanza!

Warren McDonald's, 11 Market St., is offering children 12 years old and younger who are accompanied by an adults free sundaes all day Monday, April 4, in support of the **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition's** Week of the Young Child Celebration. McDonald's has also donated free fry coupons for Coalition distribution to area child care providers to help honor their role in caring for our community's children. This is the third consecutive year the restaurant has partnered with the Coalition.

March 30, 2005

Forest Press

Coalition, Partners Bring It Up A Notch

The big news is Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary Harriet Dichter is coming to town.

Dichter was appointed by Pennsylvania Secretary of Public Welfare Estelle B. Richman to direct the new Office of Child Development—an initiative that links the Department of Public Welfare and the Department of Education—in September 2004. She works to ensure coordinated leadership on children's issues and to raise the priority level concerning issues of child development, early care, and education.

The formation of this office with Deputy Secretary Dichter at its helm is “a major victory for early childhood education in Pennsylvania,” Dichter said. “We have struggled for years with oversight among so many state entities. We now, for the first time, have a single Commonwealth office devoted exclusively to the educational needs of young children.”

“I am delighted to have been invited to visit Forest and Warren counties to help celebrate the Week of the Young Child. The efforts of the local Coalition are commendable and valuable. I am honored to have been invited,” Ms. Dichter said.

She accepted the invitation to help mark Week of the Young Child by attending many local events, including an event at Kids' Choice Learning Center in Marienville at 2:15 on Friday, April 8.

Area Week of the Young Child events are sponsored by **the Economic Opportunity Council's Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition**, our early care & education committee that is, in turn, sponsored by Pennsylvania's Child Care Resource Developers.

The Forest Area School District, Kids' Choice Learning Center, **Warren-Forest Head Start**, the Forest County Assistance Office, the Forest IDC and many others partnered to plan these events:

Saturday, April 2: A pre-Week of the Young Child celebration is set for the Warren Mall. Sponsored by the Warren Kiwanis, the Local Interagency Coordinating Council, and many other area agencies, this event is a family-friendly celebration that will offer the public a wide array of information relevant to caring for and educating young children. It is free and open to the public.

Sunday, April 3, 2 p.m.: The Forest County Week of the Young Child Kick-Off is 2-4 p.m. at the Kids' Choice Learning Center in Marienville (next to the car wash). Commissioner James Parrett will kick off the week by reading the official Week of the Young Child Proclamation. Fun for the full family is the plan for the day, with lots of hands-on, free activities. The Forest IDC and the **EOC** will distribute the first annual Family Friendly—Everybody Winds!—Business Awards, and there will be complimentary refreshments from Choice Enterprises. Grandparents and others who care for relative children are cordially invited to attend. Children do not have to be enrolled at the center to attend—and kids of all ages are welcome! Various agencies—Penn State Cooperative Extension, **Head Start**, the schools, and others—will have information available for one and all! Sponsors include Choice Enterprises, Forest IDC, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Forest Area School District, the Forest County Assistance Office, the **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care Information Services**. In Warren, a simultaneous celebration will occur at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Second Avenue.

Monday-Friday, April 4-8, 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.: "Celebrity" readers will visit the Forest child care center, family day care provider homes, Head Start classrooms, kindergartens, and IU pre-K classrooms, to read to children! More than 20 local readers are participating!

Friday, April 8: Pennsylvania Deputy Director Harriet Dichter, director of the state's new Office of Child Development, will be present to meet the public and to speak with anyone who works with our young children, at 2:15 p.m. on Friday, April 8, at the Kids' Choice Learning Center. Ms. Dichter will read to the children at the center (and any others who would like to visit) as a WOYC "celebrity" reader. Grandparents with their little

“charges,” others who care for children are cordially invited to this very special story time! In addition, folks who work with and care for our children and would like to meet Ms. Dichter are very welcome! On Friday evening, Ms. Dichter is the guest speaker at the Warren-Forest Child Care Provider/Early Educator Provider Appreciation Dinner. Her speech is entitled, “Children’s Opportunities—Our Responsibilities.” Warren County School District, Forest Area School, Highmark, Blair Corporation, McDonald’s, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Warren Zonta, Farrah Grotto, and others are co-sponsoring this event. Child Care providers, pre-k teachers and kindergarten teachers who have not yet been offered complimentary tickets are invited to call **Kelly Kelley at the CCIS** at 726-1361.

Saturday, April 9: A no-stops, fun-filled FREE Children’s Fair with more than two dozen area agencies and early care and education stakeholders are sponsoring hands-on activities for kids is the bang-up closing event. Attractions include the Warren firefighters and a fire truck; face painting; KidCare photo ids and fingerprint kits; Bubble Gum DJ Marty Loomis, **Head Start**, Keystone Stars, and Pennsylvania Health Department information; child care provider art projects; a school readiness info table sponsored by PNC Bank—and more! Warren Youth Volunteer Corps is assisting the Coalition at the event at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Second Ave., Warren. The fair is free and open to all residents and families of Warren and Forest counties!

Ms. Dichter has expressed her appreciation of the recognition Warren and Forest agencies and businesses are giving the Week of the Young Child. “Pennsylvania is building a network of early care and education that will serve our families and children in this and future generations. The grassroots, ambitious, collaborative approaches your community as taken to develop Seamless Education will serve your children well,” she stated.

March 23, 2005

Forest Press

Forest County Celebrates Week of the Young Child

Events for the Week of the Young Child will begin with a kick-off celebration, Sunday April 3 from 1-3 pm at Kids’ Choice Learning Center in Marienville. The community is invited to participate in the FREE and fun official Week of the Young Child. A Forest County dignitary will be on hand to read an official proclamation. Children and families are invited to enjoy refreshments and hands-on activities.

Several for-profit businesses will be given Family Friendly Appreciation Awards by the **Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** and the **Warren Forest Economic Opportunity Council**. Choice Enterprises is supplying the refreshments, and many local agencies are offering information for families.

Monday-Friday, April 4-8: “Celebrity” readers will visit Kids’ Choice, **Head Start**. The pre-k Intermediate classrooms and our family day care provider homes to read to the children! The invited readers include the commissioners, Duane Vicini, Forest Area School District superintendent; Mrs. Cindy Yeagle, Director, Forest County Assistance Office; Nancy Cherico, Principal, West Forest Elementary; Mike Hardy, Principal, West Forest High School; Supt. Raymond J. Sobina, SCI Forest; **Robert Raible, Executive Director Warren-Forest EOC; Roxanne Carifo, Director Warren-Forest Head Start; Tish Montgomery, Director Warren-Forest CCIS;** Farley Wright, Forest IDC’ Ginger Schaffer, Timberwood Realty; Allegheny National Forest District Ranger Leon Blashock; Joseph C. Collins, director, Cornell Abraxus; Kathy Culver, Editor, The Forest Press; The Honorable Paul H. Millin, Judge; District Attorney Barbara C. Litten; Public Defender Elizabeth Ziegler; Sheriff Robert Wolfgang; Judith McDaid, Focus on Forest’s Future; and Harriet Dichter, Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Office of Child Development.

Additional activities for the week include a child care provider/early educator appreciation dinner at the Russell Elementary School, Friday April 8 from 6-8 pm. Keynote speaker for the evening will be Harriet Dichter, Director of the Office of PA Child Development. A Children’s Fun Fair will be held from 10 am – 2 pm at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, 207 Second Street, Warren. A variety of hands-on activities will be available throughout the day including face painting, KidCare photo id’s and fingerprint kids, Bubblegum DJ Marty Loomis and information materials for parents.

Sponsors for the week include the Zonta Club of Warren, Better Kid Care, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Warren and Forest School Districts, WCCBI and Warren-Forest School Readiness Coalition. For more information or to become involved in the weeklong celebration contact **Warren-Forest EOC Child Care Information Services** at 726-1361.

March 23, 2005

Forest Press

EOC, WCCBI, Coalition to Honor Businesses for Family Friendly Practices

If you think supporting child care means starting an on-site day care, think again” is the message of **EOC’s Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** is delivering to the community this Week of the Young Child, according to **Tish Montgomery, the EOC’s Warren-Forest Child Care Information Services director and Coalition member.**

“New on-site child care isn’t our goal,” Montgomery explained. “We simply believe that by working together we can make changes, lift awareness about services, and help

families and providers foster school readiness.” She said that when quality child care is readily available, the employee and the employer win.

The Coalition’s focus on “community awareness of family needs in terms of child care and school readiness has been so significantly supported by these businesses,” said Ms. Montgomery. “Our motto, ‘With Quality Child Care, Everybody Wins,’ is truly understood by our local employers. Many of them have gone out of their way to open doors, to offer collaborations, to partner, and to help us achieve our goals and tasks.

“Providing this Coalition with the resources they need to help us get all our kids ready for school is a win-win,” explained **Robert Raible, Executive Director of EOC**. “Studies have shown that investments in early care can really positively impact a community’s overall quality of life. Paybacks are incredibly beneficial and end up saving taxpayers money.”

“When we began our work, for example, the Warren-Times Observer helped us administer a community survey by donating a full page of space. Last year, Othram Sylvania fund a training collaborative committee that has helped us to be able to combine training resources for early education teachers and child care providers. These are only two examples of the kind of support we have received from our business community,” Montgomery explained.

The Coalition recently completed a review of projects, plans and past accomplishments. “In looking over all that we have worked toward these past few years, we came to realize that our employers have really stepped up to the plate. They are interested in helping us as we work together to address family and child needs and we are so grateful for that,” said Kathy Hurst, Russell Day Care Center director and Coalition member. “Community support for school readiness is fundamental to our projects and work.”

Hurst said that in addition to the honored businesses, a wide array of non-profit organizations, school districts, and local and regional agencies have also supported Coalition efforts.

The following for-profit businesses are the winners of the first Family Friendly Everybody Wins Business Awards:

The Times Observer, the Warren Mall, Warren McDonald’s Restaurant, Osram Sylvania, AllSound Recording, Charter Communications, Northwest Savings Bank, Catering Plus, The Valley Voice, Steppin’ Out, Surdevant Signs, Quality Markets, Bilo, Snyder Memorial, PNC Bank, The House of Printing, The Warren County Guide, Heaven Scent Florist, Star 104, KDKA 1020, WKSJ/WHUG, WJT, Kinzua Broadcasting (WNAE 1310 AM, WRRN 92 Gold – 92.3 FM, and WKNB Kinzua Country 104.3 FM), WPSB-FM 90.1, WLMI (FM), Beech Tree Broadcasting, The Clarion News, The Oil City Derrick, WestPANet Inc, McGraw Hill, Open Court/Pre-K SRA, Scholastic Books, Allegheny Valley Landscaping, The Bucktail Restaurant, The Kelly Hotel, The Forest Press, and Baughman’s Market.

Awards will be presented to these businesses on Saturday, April 3, in both Warren and Forest Counties at 2 p.m. during the official Week of the Young Child Kick-Off celebrations. In Warren, the celebration is at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Second Avenue, and in Forest, the event is at Kids' Choice Learning Center in Marienville. The public is cordially invited to attend.

March 23, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Local businesses receive awards

“If you think supporting child care means starting an on-site day care, think again” is the message of **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** is delivering to the community this Week of the Young Child, according to **Tish Montgomery, the EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care Information Services director and Coalition member.**

“New on-site child care isn't our goal,” Montgomery explained. “We simply believe that by working together we can make changes, lift awareness about services, and help families and providers foster school readiness.” She said that when quality child care is readily available, the employee and the employer win.

The Coalition's focus on “community awareness of family needs in terms of child care and school readiness has been so significantly supported by these businesses,” said Ms. Montgomery. “Our motto, ‘With Quality Child Care, Everybody Wins,’ is truly understood by our local employers. Many of them have gone out of their way to open doors, to offer collaborations, to partner, and to help us achieve our goals and tasks.

“Providing this Coalition with the resources they need to help us get all our kids ready for school is a win-win,” explained **Robert Raible, Executive Director of EOC.** “Studies have shown that investments in early care can really positively impact a community's overall quality of life. Paybacks are incredibly beneficial and end up saving taxpayers money.”

“When we began our work, for example, the Warren-Times Observer helped us administer a community survey by donating a full page of space. Last year, Ogram Sylvania fund a training collaborative committee that has helped us to be able to combine training resources for early education teachers and child care providers. These are only two examples of the kind of support we have received from our business community,” Montgomery explained.

The Coalition recently completed a review of projects, plans and past accomplishments. “In looking over all that we have worked toward these past few years, we came to realize that our employers have really stepped up to the plate. They are interested in helping us as we work together to address family and child needs and we are so grateful for that,” said Kathy Hurst, Russell Day Care Center director and Coalition member. “Community support for school readiness is fundamental to our projects and work.”

Hurst said that in addition to the honored businesses, a wide array of non-profit organizations, school districts, and local and regional agencies have also supported Coalition efforts.

The following for-profit businesses are the winners of the first Family Friendly Everybody Wins Business Awards:

The Times Observer, the Warren Mall, Warren McDonald’s Restaurant, Osram Sylvania, AllSound Recording, Charter Communications, Northwest Savings Bank, Catering Plus, The Valley Voice, Steppin’ Out, Surdevant Signs, Quality Markets, Bilo, Snyder Memorial, PNC Bank, The House of Printing, The Warren County Guide, Heaven Scent Florist, Star 104, KDKA 1020, WKSJ/WHUG, WJT, Kinzua Broadcasting (WNAE 1310 AM, WRRN 92 Gold – 92.3 FM, and WKNB Kinzua Country 104.3 FM), WPSB-FM 90.1, WLMI (FM), Beech Tree Broadcasting, The Clarion News, The Oil City Derrick, WestPANet Inc, McGraw Hill, Open Court/Pre-K SRA, Scholastic Books, Allegheny Valley Landscaping, The Bucktail Restaurant, The Kelly Hotel, The Forest Press, and Baughman’s Market.

Awards will be presented to these businesses on Saturday, April 3, in both Warren and Forest Counties at 2 p.m. during the official Week of the Young Child Kick-Off celebrations. In Warren, the celebration is at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, Second Avenue, and in Forest, the event is at Kids’ Choice Learning Center in Marienville. The public is cordially invited to attend.

March 22, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Week of Young Child April 3-9

It’s big news to area educators: Deputy Secretary Harriet Dichter is coming to town and will be visiting both Warren and Forest counties, before providing the keynote address at an appreciation dinner for early childhood educators Friday, April 8.

Dichter was appointed by Pennsylvania Secretary of Public Welfare Estelle B. Richman to direct the new Office of Child Development—an initiative that links the Department of Public Welfare and the Department of Education—in September 2004. She works to

ensure coordinated leadership on children's issues and to raise the priority level concerning issues of child development, early care and education.

The formation of this office with Deputy Secretary Dichter at its helm is "a major victory for early childhood education in Pennsylvania," Richman stated. "We have struggled for years with oversight of early care and education divided among so many different state entities. We now, for the first time, have a single Commonwealth office devoted exclusively to the needs of young children."

"I am delighted to have been invited to visit Warren and Forest counties to help celebrate the Week of the Young Child. The efforts of the local coalition are commendable and valuable. I am honored to have been invited," Ms. Dichter said.

She accepted the invitation to help Warren and Forest Counties mark the Week of the Child by attending many local events, including the keynote address at **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition's** Provider Appreciation Dinner on Friday, April 8.

The week's full schedule includes these events:

Saturday, April 2: A pre-Week of the Young Child celebration is set for the Warren Mall. Sponsored by the Warren Kiwanis, the Local Interagency Coordinating Council, and many other area agencies, this event is a family-friendly celebration that will offer the public a wide array of information relevant to caring for and educating young children. It is free and open to the public.

Sunday, April 3, 2 p.m.: Simultaneous kick-off celebrations are occurring in Warren and Forest Counties. Mayor Mark Phillips will read the official proclamation in Warren at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, 207 Second Avenue. Representative Kathy Rapp will begin the weeklong celebrity reading series by reading a story to young children. Several for-profit businesses will be given Family Friendly Everybody Wins Awards by the Coalition, the Warren Chamber of Business and Industry, and the **Warren-Forest County Economic Opportunity Council**. In addition, the 40th anniversary of **Head Start** will be recognized. Refreshments have been donated by Thom's Bi-Lo. Forest County's kick-off is at Kid's Choice Learning Center in Marienville and is open to the public. Sponsors include Choice Enterprises, Forest Area School District, Forest County Assistance Office, and the **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care Information Services**.

Monday-Friday April 4-8, 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.: "Celebrity" readers will visit Warren and Forest child care centers, Head Start classrooms, kindergartens, IU pre-K classrooms and family child care homes to read to children twice a day! More than 70 local readers have been invited to participate. The readers include business owners, CEOs, politicians, executive directors of agencies, church pastors, library directors, and many, many others!

Friday, April 8: Dichter will attend a luncheon meeting of the Warren-Forest School Readiness Coalition, read to children as a celebrity reader at the Jefferson DeFrees

Family Center; read to children as the celebrity reader at Kid's Choice in Marienville; attend a pre-dinner Education Policy session with school district officials, Head Start, and CCIS, and speak at the Provider Appreciation Dinner. Her speech is entitled, "Children's Opportunities—Our Responsibilities." Warren County School District, McDonald's, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Zonta Club of Warren, Farrah Grotto, the WCCBI, and others are co-sponsoring this event. Child Care providers, pre-K teachers who have not yet been offered complimentary tickets are invited to call **Kelly Kelley at the CCIS** at 726-1361.

Saturday, April 9: A no-stops, fun-filled FREE Children's Fair with more than two dozen area agencies and early care and education stakeholders are sponsoring hands-on activities for kids is the bang-up closing event. Attractions include the Warren firefighters and a fire truck; face painting; KidCare photo id's and fingerprint kits; Bubblegum DJ Marty Loomis; **Head Start**, Keystone Stars, and Pennsylvania Health Department information; child care provider art projects; a school readiness info table sponsored by PNC Bank—and more! Warren Youth Volunteer Corps is assisting the Coalition at the event at the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center. The fair is free and open to the public!

Dichter has expressed her appreciation of the recognition Warren and Forest agencies and businesses are giving to the Week of the Young Child. "Pennsylvania is building a network of early care and education that will serve our families and children in this and future generations. The grassroots, ambitious, collaborative approaches your community has taken to develop Seamless Education will serve your children well," she stated.

Dichter is a policy advisor for the Pennsylvania Department of Education and has been instrumental in launching Pennsylvania BUILD. Pennsylvania is one of only five states selected to participate in this nation initiative which focuses on Building an Early Childhood Education & Care Professional Development System. Pennsylvania officially began participating in the national BUILD initiative in August 2003 and it made substantial progress in key priority areas through December 2004. Specifically, Harriet Dichter has had a leading role in:

Development of the Governor's Early Learning Team as the state interdisciplinary team to lead and coordinate the Commonwealth work on early learning;

Establishment of the Early Learning Standards for pre-kindergarten children as the first step in establishing standards for birth-age 8 across all settings;

Creation of the DPW Office of Child Development;

Surveying of professional development needs for early learning programs, culminating in the creation of a new professional development system;

Exploration of financing need which resulted in increased subsidy reimbursement rates such that the ceiling rates for all counties are now at least between the 50th and 55th percentile; and

Addressing of a number of other issues related to developing a comprehensive early learning system, such as improvements to Keystone STARS, increased funding for Head Start, and the use of the Education Accountability Block Grants for early childhood initiatives.

Dichter is the co-author of *Financing Child Care in the United States: An Expanded Catalogue of Current Strategies* (2001). She is a former Children's Policy Director for the City of Philadelphia. She also served as deputy director at the Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, an independent children's public policy and advocacy organization. In that capacity, she leads the public policy and advocacy work for Child Care Matters. She previously served as program officer for The Pew Charitable Trusts, where she worked closely on issues of child care policy and financing; directed the Maternal and Child Health Office of the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, and worked as a legal services attorney. She is a graduate of Yale University and the University of Pennsylvania.

March 16, 2005

The Forest Press

Plans Underway for Week of the Young Child Celebration

Planning is underway for the "Week of the Young Child" celebration to be held in Warren and Forest counties April 3-9. The Week of the Young Child is a time to ensure that children experience the type of early environment—at home, at child care, at **Head Start**, at school, and in the community—that will promote their early learning. Members of the committee, along with Julie Hamilton and Andrew Egger are shown reviewing plans for the week-long celebration. Activities will include a kick-off celebration and inviting local celebrities to read to children in preschools, child care centers, Head Start, and schools. An appreciation dinner for early childhood educators will be held on Friday, April 8, beginning at 6 p.m. Harriet Dichter, director of the Office of Pennsylvania Child Development, will be the keynote speaker. She works to ensure coordinated leadership on children's issues and to raise the priority level concerning issues of child development, early care and education. On Saturday, April 9, the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center will host a Children's Fun Fair from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Children will participate in hands-on activities while parents learn about community resources for children. For more information about the fun fair or to participate call the JD Family Center at 723-6350.

March 10, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Week of the Young Child

Planning is underway for the “Week of the Young Child” celebration to be held in Warren and Forest counties April 3-9. The Week of the Young Child is a time to ensure that children experience the type of early environment—at home, at child care, at **Head Start**, at school, and in the community—that will promote their early learning. Members of the committee, along with Julie Hamilton and Andrew Egger are shown reviewing plans for the week-long celebration. Activities will include a kick-off celebration and inviting local celebrities to read to children in preschools, child care centers, Head Start, and schools. An appreciation dinner for early childhood educators will be held on Friday, April 8, beginning at 6 p.m. Harriet Dichter, director of the Office of Pennsylvania Child Development, will be the keynote speaker. She works to ensure coordinated leadership on children’s issues and to raise the priority level concerning issues of child development, early care and education. On Saturday, April 9, the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center will host a Children’s Fun Fair from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Children will participate in hands-on activities while parents learn about community resources for children. For more information about the fun fair or to participate call the JD Family Center at 723-6350.

March 10, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Programs awarded funds

Warren County has been chosen to receive \$13,855 to supplement emergency food and shelter programs.

The selection was made by the national board that is chaired by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). A panel of local representatives will determine how the funds will be distributed among the emergency food and shelter programs run by local service organizations.

Public and private voluntary organizations interested in applying for Emergency Food and Shelter Program funds must contact **Robert Raible** at 726-2400, extension 3021 for an application. The deadline for applications is March 18.

March 9, 2005

Forest Press

Funding Awarded to Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council

Rep. Kathy Rapp (R-Warren) and Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Forest) have announced that the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC)** has been awarded a grant from the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) totaling \$54,750 under the Family Savings Account Program.

“For nearly 40 years the Economic Opportunity Council has been working hard within our communities to mobilize resources to help thousands of our neighbors throughout Warren and Forest Counties become self-sufficient and offer invaluable information assistance to numerous others,” said Rapp. “I am confident that this funding will provide the EOC with even more opportunities to move forward with its mission of helping people and changing lives.”

Savings accumulated through the Family Savings Account program enables participants at the end of two years to finance a \$50,000 home, tuition at a Pennsylvania community college, or provide equity in a business or assist in obtaining a loan.

“Promoting economic independence is always important,” said White. “The Family Savings Account Program goes beyond that by providing not only the funds but the education to help residents strive for the own betterment and that of the community as well.”

March 5, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Funding awarded to Warren-Forest EOC

The Warren-Forest Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) has been awarded a grant from the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) totaling \$54,750 under the Family Savings Account Program, according to Rep Kathy Rapp (R-Warren) and Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Forest).

The Family Savings Account program is designed to promote economic self sufficiency for lower-income Pennsylvanians through specialized education, counseling and structured savings plans. These savings can be used to help finance the purchase of a new home, pay for education expenses, day care to enable job training, start a new business or other activities with the approval of DCED.

Savings accumulated through the Family Savings Account program enables participants at the end of two years to finance a \$50,000 home, tuition at a Pennsylvania community college, or provide equity in a business or assist in obtaining a loan.

March 1, 2005

Warren Times Observer

Also on Monday, the [Warren County] commissioners met with a representative from the **Economic Opportunity Council** to discuss a request for \$792,000 in federal and state funds for subsidized child care for low-income families in Warren and Forest Counties.

The funds will be used to provide an average of \$2,500 in assistance for roughly families, said [Commissioner John] Bortz. The motion to request the funds will be acted upon at next week's meeting.

February 8, 2005

Victoria Barone
Warren Times Observer

English turns up heat for LIHEAP funds

Adequate heating assistance is not something people in northwest Pennsylvania can do without.

Congressman Phil English stopped in Warren on Monday with that message as he traveled throughout his district talking about the need to release additional Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds.

English, who spoke at the **Warren-Forest Economic Opportunity Council (EOC)** noted that as "a deep freeze" has settled over northwestern Pennsylvania and much of this nation this winter, he is urging President George Bush to release the remaining \$100 million in emergency LIHEAP funds to help low-income citizens pay for heating. Households at or below 135 percent of federal poverty guidelines (\$25,448 annually for a family of four) can qualify for LIHEAP assistance. The president released \$197 million in LIHEAP funds on Jan. 31. But, according to English, more is needed.

English is among the members of Congress who signed a letter to Bush pointing to the importance of the funds. The letter made noted of soaring energy costs and further anticipated increases. LIHEAP, which helps low-income households across the nation by providing money for heating and air conditioning costs, has been indispensable to many residents of northwestern Pennsylvania, according to English. "Low-income Americans, particularly the elderly, are most vulnerable and need this kind of help to heat their homes," English said.

Bob Raible, executive director of the EOC, pointed out that so far this year, Warren County has seen an increase in regular LIHEAP and crisis applications as well as non-fuel crisis situations.

“This is not encouraging, considering we are expecting at least six more weeks of winter. We need all the LIHEAP funds to be released to sustain those in need throughout the season,” Raible said.

Last year, English and other members of Congress encouraged the president to include additional emergency funding for LIHEAP and increase its funding to \$2 billion, with \$297 in emergency funding in the fiscal year 2005 budget.

Bob Slocum, owner of Pipeworks Plumbing and Heating, and a contractor for EOC, told English that through his work, he regularly encounters people who are in terrible need. He has encountered senior citizens and families with young children living with no heat for days on end during the winter, Slocum said.

“People are struggling to survive,” Slocum said. “...There’s a lot of it out there, and it’s sad.”

English agreed, and said people often resort to using kerosene lamps and electric heaters when they are without fuel, which can pose a health as well as a fire risk.

Jerome Stiner, EOC weatherization auditor, energy educator and lead specialist, said there are health issues which arise from malfunctioning furnaces and that LIHEAP therefore saves money in programs like Medicare and Medicaid. He added that work on furnaces provided by LIHEAP can increase their efficiency by 50 percent, reducing heating bills dramatically.

Asked how adequate funds can be released at a time when the nation’s budget is being tightened, English said, “I think we can control spending, but we need to do it with a scalpel, not a meat ax.”

There are other, less vital, areas of the budget that can be cut, according to English, who also noted that LIHEAP comprises a small portion of the entire budget.

“There is money available, even in a tight budget to help people,” English said.

2004

November 20, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Seamless education projects to promote school readiness launched in child centers

Warren County School District believes in Seamless Education. With funding from federal grants, it has successfully launched two school readiness initiatives in Warren child care centers. Both of the projects have been presented as models to other agencies and districts across the state, and both are designed to foster fewer transitions in early learning.

“Research in brain development shows that in order for children to be ready for school, they all need quality early care that fosters social, emotional and cognitive development. We know that school readiness begins at birth, and we are delighted to have been able to lead the effort to establish firm partnerships with some of the child care providers who care for our children before they enter school,” said Rosemarie Green, District Supervisor of Federal Programs and Staff Development.

In order to reach young children and to foster school readiness, the district has partnered with the seven Warren County Child Care Centers in the sponsorship of a pre-reading program and a computer program that fosters early mathematical fluency.

With grant funding, the District’s K-2 reading system, Open Court, a product of McGraw Hill, has been purchased by the district for the centers. Center teachers and care providers have been trained to use the phonemic pre-K literacy kits, with children ages 3 – 5. Penn State Cooperative Extension and its training resource, Pennsylvania Pathways, with district support, certified and coordinated the child care provider training for the effort.

“I cannot tell you how important this outreach has been to our families and our children,” said Wendy Wilcox, Rouse Children’s Center Director and Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition member. “With School district support, we have been able to begin to introduce our youngsters to the same literacy programs that they will encounter in kindergarten. The kids love Open Court, and so do our teachers!”

Roxanne Carifo, Warren-Forest Head Start Director and Coalition member, said, “We purchased and have been using the Open Court curriculum in all of our classes. Our teachers have received extensive Open Court training and have been very pleased with the children’s response. We support and participate in the Coalition’s efforts to provide the Open Court curriculum in all child care settings.” Early on in the effort, Head Start helped purchase preliminary Open Court materials for use in the centers.

Mrs. Wilcox said that she and other Coalition members will continue with their efforts to bring such opportunities to children in as many child care settings as possible. “We know this is wonderful for all children, and we don’t intend to stop with just child care centers.”

Centers were selected for first-round efforts because the district was able to reach the most children at these central facilities. “The selection of the centers as the pilot facilities for these projects was based on the numbers of children in specific age groups, “ said **Tish Montgomery, the EOC’s Child Care Information Service’s director and Coalition member.**

Centers were also the recipients of computers and software that will introduce some of Warren’s early learners to technology, and via the software, fundamental math. The software also helps to foster early literacy.

Within the No Child Left Behind Act, significant funding was allocated to the new “Enhancing Education through Technology” program. The EETT program consolidates the current Technology Literacy Challenge Fund (TLCF) and Technology Innovation Challenge Grant programs into a single state educational technology program. In Warren, a portion of the funding was used to purchase the computers and software that are now in use in the child care centers.

“These computers and this software is an incredible tool for area child care centers,” said Susan Anderson, Associate Executive Director of the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center and Coalition member. “Child care providers frequently operate on non-profit budgets. Many centers across Pennsylvania do not even have a single computer available for child use. We are so thankful to the innovative thinkers in the Warren school district. We really believe that our community is on the road to real Seamless Education, and that is really good for our children and families.

“Reaching out to build a collaborative foundation for early learning is so very commendable,” according to **Robert Raible, Warren-Forest Economic Opportunity Council’s Executive Director.** The EOC is the lead agency for the Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition, the organization that helped facilitate and launch the Open Court and computer projects. “We know that this project is a state model or collaboration. Our Coalition is a highly commendable group of people who are able to think outside the box and create much good in our community.”

Formed in 2001, the Coalition’s membership includes representatives from child care, Head Start, both school districts, both county Health Departments, both County Assistance Offices, Warren and Forest parents, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Children & Youth, area churches, Health and Human Services, the EOC and its CCIS, Focus of Forest’s Future, Intermediate Units, Snyder Memorial Health Care, Highmark’s Children Health Insurance Plan, and many others. The group’s mission is to “make a positive difference in the lives of children and families by supporting quality child care, so that our children will achieve their highest potential.”

The Coalition is supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare through Child Care Resource Developers, and has received additional support in past years from the Warren foundation, the Highmark Foundation, Osram Sylvania, Scholastic Books, Quality Markets, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and others.

“Seamless Education begins with getting all agencies and people to who work with and for children from birth through college on the same page. Coordination and planning reduces transitions, as well as builds learning. In this way, we reinforce each other’s work; in fact, we build on what each other does,” explained Mrs. Montgomery.

She said details of the pilot project have been shared with other Early Care & Education Committees in Western Pennsylvania, with regional Head Start representatives, with the new Pennsylvania Office for Child Development and its director, Harriet Dichter, with Pennsylvania BUILD, and with others.

The Open Court reading kits and the computer systems were placed with First Presbyterian Day Care, Market St. & Third Avenue; the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center Day Care, 207 Second Ave.; North Warren Presbyterian Day Care, 3 Church St.; the Rouse Children’s Center, 709 Rouse Ave., Youngsville; Russell United Methodist Day Care; the Ruth M. Smith Day Care, Sheffield’ and the Warren County YMCA Day Care, 212 Lexington Ave.

The district has applied for a second round of funding. If that grant is secured, pre-K Open Court and additional computer systems will be placed in area preschools in the next round of the project.

November 5, 2004

News Release

Contact: Robert Raible, Executive Director

814-726-2400

raible@wfcaa.org

EOC reminds low-income residents to apply for energy assistance programs

Congress urged to increase funding for winter energy help

Warren, PA, 11/5 – With cold weather tightening its grip and heating costs on the rise, the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC)** reminds area low-income residents help is available and urges Congress to pass increased funding when they return to Washington, D.C.

The Low-Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps low-income families by providing money to help pay for heating costs. About 295,000 Pennsylvania households a year receive LIHEAP assistance.

“Monday (Nov. 8) is the first day low-income residents can sign up to receive LIHEAP help this winter,” said **Robert Raible, Warren-Forest EOC Executive Director**. “Chronically under funded, only one out of five of the households eligible for the services actually receive them.”

The Warren-Forest EOC works within the community to provide support to low-income families struggling to overcome poverty. EOC provides them with the tools needed to overcome obstacles to self-sufficiency including home-heating costs. Locally, the Warren County Board of Assistance administers the LIHEAP program and EOC makes referrals to them.

“The northeast accounts for 90 percent of the home-heating oil used in the United States,” Raible said. “With skyrocketing home heating costs and a colder-than-normal and lengthy winter projected, demand for the funding will be high.”

A federally funded program, LIHEAP monies for Fiscal Year 2005 have yet to be allocated. The House-passed LIHEAP funding is at \$2.2 billion. An additional \$22 million to be shared with another program was also allocated for the program. The Senate will continue consideration of the bill when Congress returns to session Nov. 16. Pennsylvania does not have a state program to augment the assistance provided by LIHEAP.

“When LIHEAP as we know it began in 1982, Congress provided \$1.87 billion in funding,” Raible said. “Congress is considering \$2.2 billion in funding for 2005 while cost of living has increased 102 percent during that same period. We need Congress to fully fund this vital program and even consider provide additional monies for our neighbors in need.”

Those applying for LIHEAP need not have an unpaid bill to receive energy assistance and can receive this money without being on welfare. Cash grants are based on income, family size, type of heating fuel and heating regions. The program can pay for monthly heating costs, emergency furnace repairs or weatherizing a home. Additional money is available to individuals if they have an emergency situation and are in jeopardy of losing their heat. Emergency situations include:

- broken heating equipment or leaking lines that must be fixed or replaced
- lack of fuel
- termination of utility service
- danger of being without fuel or having utility service terminated

Household Size	Cash/Crisis Program Income Limit: 135% of Federal Poverty Guidelines
-----------------------	---

1	\$12,569
2	\$16,862
3	\$21,155
4	\$25,448

“Our low-income seniors, families and disabled cannot be left out in the cold,” Raible said. “Dropping temperatures and soaring energy costs will strain household budgets to the breaking point. We must make certain simply trying to keep warm is not an obstacle for those working to get out of poverty.”

October 21, 2004

Matt Ewald
Warren Times Observer

Ground broken for Warren Anthems

For persons suffering chronic mental illness, the Anthems project may provide a new place to call home.

Construction is officially underway for Warren Anthems, an eight-unit apartment project which will provide housing for low-income residents with chronic mental illness. The six one-bedroom units and two two-bedroom units will be located on a hillside at 116 Muir Street

A groundbreaking ceremony was held Wednesday afternoon.

The Anthems project has been in the work for four years, and represents a partnership between the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC), and the Housing and Neighborhood Development Services (HANDS).

HANDS has worked on several housing projects in Erie County, and helped the EOC secure funding for the Anthems project.

Bob Raible, executive director of the EOC, said Warren Anthems will serve as “the first of its kind” in Warren County, offering adults with chronic mental health concerns an opportunity for independent living. Support services for the residents will be provided by Northwest Human Development.

Residents for the Anthem units must have an income at or below 50 percent of median income for Warren County. Rent and utilities will be limited to no more than 30% of a resident’s gross income.

While the Conewango Towers does provide housing for some residents with mental health issues, most apartment units are occupied by elderly residents and those with physical disabilities.

Warren County Commissioner John Bortz said the Anthems project will also service as key aspect of development in the county. Pointing to the surveyors at work on the site, Bortz cited the construction and development of public services projects like Warren Anthems as a significant aspect of economic growth.

Congressman Phil English, who attended the groundbreaking ceremony, believes the Anthems project will be “an enormous benefit to the community.” He specifically praised the partnership of EOC and HANDS for showing “how effective this kind of program can be.”

“They’ve shown how to bring together federal, state, and local dollars, but the real vision has to come from the local level,” said English.

Addressing concerns from some neighbors near the site on Muir Street, Raible explained that the Anthems apartments will be for “people who are already working here, people you see everyday.” Raible also cited several studies that indicate that such a housing project would not decrease property values of nearby homes.

While Raible was unable to comment on how many residents have already expressed interest in Warren Anthems, he admitted the potential for a long wait list was very likely. “The need is incredible,” said Raible.

Raible anticipates Warren Anthems will begin to accept applications by mid to late summer, and hopes to have all eight units occupied by the end of the summer.

As he waited for the groundbreaking ceremony to begin, county commissioner David Bauer praised the Anthems project as a significant marker in how Warren County has progressed in its treatment and acceptance of persons suffering mental health problems.

Standing next to him, Bortz asserted that the project will “embrace a segment of our population and give them an opportunity to live somewhat independently.”

Looking down on the construction site, Bauer agreed. “They’re going to have their own home on the hillside,” he said.

October 18, 2004

News Release

Contact: Robert Raible, Executive Director

814-726-2400, Ext. 3021

raible@wfcaa.org

Warren Anthems to Have Wednesday Groundbreaking

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) will be hosting an official groundbreaking for Warren Anthems, a proposed eight-unit apartment project, on Wednesday, October 20. The ceremony, which will take place at 116 Muir Street in the City of Warren, is scheduled for 1:00.

The Warren Anthems project, a joint effort of the EOC and Housing and Neighborhood Development Service (HANDS), will provide affordable rental units for persons with chronic mental illness. Residents must have an income at or below 50% of median income for Warren County. Rent and utility expenses are limited to no more than 30% of the tenant's gross annual income. HANDS will manage the project with supportive services being provided by a variety of local agencies including Northwest Human Development, the Warren County Department of Human Services, and EOC.

“Warren Anthems will be the only affordable housing project of its type in Warren County,” **EOC Executive Director Robert Raible** stated. There has been a long unmet need for supportive housing, and Warren Anthems is an important first step in rectifying the situation.”

September 22, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Keeping Warm

Doris Swan, Economic Opportunity Council representative, will be at Warren Senior Community Center at 11 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 22, to discuss weatherization and utility assistance for seniors. Seniors who struggle to pay heating and utility bills during the winter are encouraged to attend for information that could help. Lunch reservations may be made by calling 723-4180.

May 26, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Autism Program Set

William Stillman, an adult with Asperger's Syndrome, will be the featured presenter at a day-long free public seminar on autism from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, June 2, at the Warren Holiday Inn.

Parents, grandparents and others who care for children are invited to attend. Advance registration is necessary, and seating is limited.

The rate of autism incidents has increased by 855% in Pennsylvania since 1993, according to a study by the U.S. Department of Education. Individuals with Asperger's or autism often come to the attention of a professional as a result of difficulties associated with living with this social disability" exclusion and rejection are common themes expressed by individuals with these disorders, according to Ellen Fenster-Kuehl, Ph.D., in *NJ Psychologist Magazine*.

"We believe the challenge to include children with special needs such as autism and Asperger's can be met by offering first-rate, compassionate, professional information—seminars such as this one with Bill Stillman, said **Tish Montgomery**, member of the **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** and **director of the EOC's Child Care Information Services**. "With understanding, inclusion is easier."

"Autism is a developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life. It is four times more prevalent in boys than girls. Two children, both with autism, can act very differently from one another and have varying skills. Asperger's Disorder is a Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), and is distinguished from autism by the severity of the symptoms and the absence of language delays, according to the information released by the coalition.

Stillman has worked in the disabilities field since 1987 and was employed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare as a statewide point person for children with mental health issues and autism.

"Bill Stillman is a breath of fresh air. He is a gift to the students we serve. In my many years of education I have come to learn it is a truly rare combination and is a very special person who possesses the knowledge, insight, sincerity and compassion to move people," said Patrick Moore, director of special education, State College Area School District, after attending a similar seminar.

Stillman's book, "Demystifying the Autistic Experience: A Humanistic Introduction for Parents, Caregivers and Educators," can be ordered from Warren Waldenbooks. The cover price is \$17.95.

Judy Baker of the Warren-Forest autism support group, "U R Not Alone," said she and other members of her group are pleased the coalition is dedicated to informing the public of issues relevant to children with special needs. "I have learned, as I have begun to see the world through my son's eyes, that I am not sure if people with Asperger's and autism are the ones with issues. It may be us, the 'normal' people, who do not understand, and who have issues," she said. U R Not Alone meets every Tuesday of every month. For more information, email jbaker@kinzua.net.

The coalition will sponsor two more community seminars in 2004-05. Topics being considered are childhood obesity, allergies, asthma, and ADHD.

Stillman's presentation is sponsored by the **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition**, Planning for Early Care & Education; Penn State Cooperative Extension; the **Warren-Forest EOC's CCIS**, and supported, in part, by the Pennsylvania Department of Health through the Maternal and Child Health Services Title I Block Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Call the Warren-Forest CCIS office today at 726-1361 and ask for Kelly to reserve your free seat and complimentary lunch. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis.

May 6, 2004

Warren Times Observer

May 7 Proclaimed Local Provider Appreciation Day

The Warren County Commissioners have proclaimed Friday, May 7, 2004 as Provider Appreciation Day in Warren County by signing an official proclamation.

Warren McDonald's, the Warren Mall, **Warren-Forest Head Start**, the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center and the **Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** are the official regional sponsors of the day. In celebration of the day, McDonald's is honoring child care providers with free breakfast sandwich coupons in thanks for their hard work and dedication. The coupons will be mailed directly to child care providers by the **Warren-Forest Child Care Information Services** office.

Provider Appreciation Day recognizes child care providers, teachers and educators of young children everywhere. Started in 1996 by a group of volunteers in New Jersey, it is celebrated each year on the Friday before Mother's Day. According to the Provider's Appreciation Day website, there are at least 2.8 million people who earn their money by teaching and caring for young children or by working in directly related jobs.

"This day gives those of us with young children in our lives the opportunity to thank the people who care for and teach our young children. These providers are very important people, and we are delighted to be able to thank them for all of their efforts," said **Tish Montgomery, CCIS director** and Coalition member.

"Provider Appreciation Day is held so everyone can appreciate the number and importance of child care workers. The early childhood profession not only plays a critical role in supporting healthy families and children but it is also a key part of our entire national economy," according to a national press release.

Provider Day organizers agree, "It takes a dedicated person to be successful in the demanding world of today's child care professional. Provider Appreciation Day offers a unique opportunity to recognize and commend the unselfish dedication, compassion and strong family values that child care providers demonstrate every day.

April 15, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Schools and Administrators Receive Partnership Awards

In celebration of the Week of the Young Child, April 18-24, the **Warren-Forest EOC's Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** is honoring Warren County School District, Forest Area School District and two distinct administrators with its annual Partnership Awards.

This year, the Week of the Young Child, "is a time to recognize that children's opportunities are our responsibilities, and to recommit ourselves to ensuring that each and every child experiences the type of early environment – at home, at child care, at school, and in the community – that will promote their early learning," according to organizers at National Association of Young Children.

Rosemarie Green, WCSD supervisor of federal programs, and Duane Vocini, Forest Area Superintendent, are the individual recipients, honored for their "willingness to promote and advance community awareness of child care and school readiness issues by active participation and leadership."

"These people and are schools are true partners. Duane and Rosemarie are dedicated members of our region's public school system. They have worked very hard to welcome early care and education providers by sharing school readiness information, supporting coalition projects and trainings, and generally just paving the way for good things to grow," said **Tish Montgomery, CCIS director** and coalition member.

Vicini has helped the group focus on employer outreach, technological networking, Act 48 coordination of credit, and other coalition strategies and plans. "He has the absolute best wishes for the families and children of Forest County in his heart and mind. He knows and understands that quality child care helps children get ready for school, and he is dedicated to helping that happen," said Cindy Yeagle, Forest County Assistance Office executive director and coalition member.

Forest Area School District has offered space and technology sharing, Forest Area Partnership formation, as well as school readiness collaboration.

Green helped support and shape the Warren Partnership for Seamless Education, a 10-member community think tank with a hands-on neighborhood focus. In addition, she has opened the door and led the way for Warren County literacy collaboration by advocating the sharing of the district's reading program, Open Court, with area child care providers. "Rosemarie understands the recent findings in early brain development research compels all of us to share resources, knowledge, goals, and strategies," said Barbara White, R.N.C., of the Warren State Health Center and coalition member.

Montgomery said the individual recipients are “giving, dedicated, professional creative and generous resources for our coalition and our regional community.”

The school districts and “these administrators are exemplary models of how districts can and should interact, support and collaborate with a community’s early care and education system. The prototype that these folks have built in Warren and Forest counties could serve as a pilot for other projects anywhere in the state,” said **Robert Raible, EOC’s Executive Director.**

March 26, 2004

Ellen Kranick
Warren Times Observer

Commissioners Say Time is Key to Development

* * *

They [the Warren County commissioners] approved a \$295,652 grant that will enable HANDS, a non-profit Erie-based group, to construct eight-unit housing in Warren for mentally challenged people. The federal Housing and Urban Development agency is the source of the money.

[Commissioner David] Bauer said the Warren Anthems project has been a goal of the **Warren-Forest Economic Opportunity Council** for several years to provide housing for people “really in need.”

March 25, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Coalition Honors Wright

Penn State Cooperative Extension agent Phyllis Wright is the recipient of the 2004 Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Special Recognition Award.

“Phyllis Wright is a real pro. She makes every effort to network, share, and facilitate the efforts of our coalition as we work to address child care and school readiness needs,” said **Tish Montgomery, EOC’s Warren-Forest Child Care Information Services director** and Coalition member. “If there is a way to get something done, Phyllis is ready to help find it.”

The coalition issued Wright its first appreciation award at a special luncheon on March 23 at the Livery Street Café.

Cindy Yeagle, Forest County CAO executive director, a member of the coalition's nominating committee, said, "Our award to Phyllis was by unanimous decision. There was simply no discussion. Phyllis Wright is a credit to our entire regional community as we all work to share resources, professional insight and knowledge. The coalition extends to her our congratulations and our sincere thanks."

Other members of the committee included **Kelly Kelley, CCIS referral specialist;** Randy Teska, Warren County Assistance office supervisor; **Rev. David Leininger, EOC board** and pastor of First Presbyterian; Kit Jaskiewicz, CHIP outreach educator; and John Bowler, Children and Youth, Warren County Department of Human Services.

George Wilcox, County Executive director, said that he and Wright's co-workers value her veteran experience and enthusiastic work ethic.

"Phyllis is firmly committed to families and children, something we all recognize and value at Warren's Penn State Cooperative Extension. We are very pleased for her, and we are not at all surprised. She deserves the recognition."

The coalition is the region's Early Care & Education Committee and is sponsored by the **Warren-Forest EOC**. It will award this year's community partnership awards during the Week of the Young Child, April 18-24.

March 18, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Family Savings Account

Income eligible persons can have their savings matched up to \$2,000 over a two-year period by the state of Pennsylvania.

The **Warren Forest Economic Opportunity Council** will hold an informational open house at 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 23, at 1209 Pennsylvania Ave. W. for anyone interested in opening a Family Savings Account.

For more information, call the EOC at 726-2400, extension 3030.

March 11, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Coalition Launches Seamless Reading Program

In collaborative effort to facilitate school and reading readiness, the **EOC's Warren-Forest Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** has purchased and is giving away components of a research-driven, highly respected pre-k reading program that has direct connection to Warren County kindergartens and elementary classrooms.

The Coalition, sponsored by Warren Partnership for Seamless Education and the Coordinated Training Committee, developed a project that will help child care providers, preschool teachers and others to lay the groundwork for literacy, said **Tish Montgomery**, the **EOC's Child Care Information Services Director**.

“When we asked Warren County School District to help us understand their reading program and to weight whether or not it would be beneficial to involve child care providers, we were given immediate professional advise and support” by Rosemary Green, supervisor for WCSD federal programs and curriculum; Ann Buerkle, Market Street principal; and Warren kindergarten teachers Lisa Steffy and Linda Gilson, Montgomery said.

The Open Court Reading Program has been in use in Warren County schools for several years. The company's pre-k program introduces younger children to the same phonemic awareness.

According to a paper by Marilyn Jager Adams of the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, “For 40 years, Open Court Reading has steadfastly structured its curriculum on the strongest lessons research could offer. For 40 years, as literacy research has grown in power and scope, Open Court Reading has been augmented and tuned or changed accordingly. For 40 years, Open Court Reading has demonstrated that lessons based on tested, research-based practices get results. Over and over, the achievement of students who have been taught with Open Court Reading has been shown to be exceptional on state-mandated tests, national standardized tests, district tests, and a host of more specific measures.”

The use of Open Court pre-k flashcards “in early learning environments is incredibly important to our teachers,” said Green. “If a kindergartner can walk into his new classroom and see similar graphics and characters he met in preschool or in child care, that child has an immediate connection. That is an immediate plus for the child and the kindergarten teacher.”

“Continuity in education, especially in reading, is very important for children. In our modern day life of multiple transitions and busy-ness, anything that we can give to kids that will help them transition from their pre-kindergarten experience into school is a magnificent plan,” said **Roxanne Carifo**, the **EOC's Warren Forest Head Start Director**.

Coalition member Susan Anderson, assistant director of the Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, said the support from the district has been significantly appreciated by area providers. "The Warren County child care community is very excited about this project."

Osram Sylvania funded the effort with a \$2,000 grant. The funding was used to purchase one complete program and 30 sets of sound/alphabet cards, which have been distributed for free to area providers. Warren-Forest Head Start partnered with the purchase of reading strips that were distributed with each set of cards. The strips are used to set up literacy centers in preschools and child care settings.

Penn State Cooperative Extension Better Kid Care offered a training session led by Steffy, Gilson and Phyllis Wright, Penn State Cooperative Extension agent, this past week. Thirty-six providers attended the 2-hour session. Miss Wright said the information and training led by the kindergarten teachers "gives our child care providers an open door to understanding early literacy. Their professional sharing is of great significance to us."

The Coalition and numerous guests attended a meeting with a reading consultant from Open Court this past week. "We have many plans – more Penn State/PA Pathways training sessions, more card and materials purchases, and more community networking," said Montgomery.

The coalition is seeking funding for the purchase of more materials, including cards. Contact Montgomery at 726-2400, ext. 3018, for more information.

February 26, 2004

Chuck Hayes
Warren Times Observer

Land Deal Paperwork Wrapped Up

The [Warren County] commissioners agreed to allocate \$50,000 to the proposed eight-unit Anthems housing complex on Muir Street for mentally retarded residents. **Robert Raible, director** of the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council**, said the project has already received \$607,000 from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, \$295,000 from the state and \$15,000 from EOC.

Groundbreaking is planned for this summer, said Raible.

County grants administrator Lori Dunlap said the \$50,000 will come from the county's Act 137 trust fund. The fund uses fees collected on deeds and mortgage transactions to support programs such as housing rehabilitation and first-time homebuyer assistance.

Dunlap said of the EOC housing, "This is a perfect project" to utilize the fund.

February 9, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Readiness Training Offered

Open Court. School Readiness.

It's not legal jargon. It's a method of teaching language and reading skills to preschoolers and kindergartners, according to Phyllis Wright, Warren County Cooperative Extension educator.

Lisa Steffey of Market Street School and Linda Gilson of Jefferson Street School will show home and center based child care providers, Head Start aides, school aides and preschool teachers how to teach preschoolers to recognize letters and their sounds, print letters and begin to read. Thanks to a grant from OSRAM, each site will receive Open Court Cards that are used for these learning skills.

The session will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 Wednesday, February 18, at Market Street School, 120 Market St. Warren.

Steffey and Gilson will also teach motions and games to reinforce the literacy and language skills. They will describe the Dibbles test given to determine literacy and language levels of a kindergarten child. There will be a checklist for school readiness and hints on organizing folders with games for literacy learning activities.

To register, contact Warren County Cooperative Extension, 609 Rouse Ave. Youngsville, call 563-7288, or fax 563-7288. Cost will be \$5 per person. The deadline is Feb. 13 or the first 25 persons who have paid registration. Those having a Warren County School District Act 48 account will receive two hours. Pennsylvania Pathways DPW will issue 2 credits.

This school readiness program is sponsored by Pennsylvania Pathways, Warren County Cooperative Extension, the **Warren Forest EOC's Child Care/School Readiness Coalition** and the **EOC's Warren Forest Child Care Information Services**.

February 6, 2004

Warren Times Observer

State Offering Family Savings Account Program through EOC

The state has earmarked \$7,000 for five Warren County residents enrolled in a special savings program offered by the **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC)**.

The Economic Opportunity Council's Family Savings Account Program will match up to \$2,000 over a specified period of time for the first qualified 50 savers.

According to the EOC staff, there's more state-matching money and savings slots available before the June 30, 2004 enrollment deadline.

Five Warren County savers have already combined to save over \$1,200 in the first year of the program. Their savings plans, once completed, could garner over a combined \$7,000 match. Their savings goals include saving for a new home and a job-related auto purchase.

Qualifying individuals or families can earn a dollar-for-dollar match on a special savings plan offered by Warren County's Community Action Agency, which is the Economic Opportunity Council in both Warren and Forest Counties.

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) awarded the EOC \$100,000 in 2003 to match savings deposits for a five-year program. The program is designed to encourage financial responsibility and build community assets.

Once matched, the savings must be used for one of several pre-approved goals, including the purchase of a home, repair of an existing home, post-secondary education, starting or expanding a business or buying a car to get to work.

At this time, only five local savers have enrolled since the program opened a year ago.

Individuals or families making 200 percent or less of federal poverty income levels must agree to put at least \$10 a week into a savings account program for one or two years. Deposits may be made weekly, monthly or quarterly.

By enrolling, clients can earn up to \$1,000 match in year one and a \$1,000 match in year two adding up to a \$2,000 match for \$2,000 saved in two years.

In addition to working toward one of the pre-approved goals for using the money, clients must attend four Family Savings Account economic workshops over their enrollment period and complete the entire program before accessing the matching money.

For information, call the EOC at 726-2400 and ask for a Family Savings Account case manager.

January 29, 2004

Warren Times Observer

Lawmakers Secure \$729,813 Grant

People with chronic illness in need of housing and low-income families having a hard time paying heating bills will get a boost from a \$729,813 grant announced Wednesday by state lawmakers representing Warren and Forest counties.

The Department of Community and Economic Development award will fund a newly constructed eight-unit housing project in Warren County for individuals with chronic illness. That grant for \$295,652 comes along with \$434,161 to both counties to minimize the adverse effects of high-energy costs on low-income families, to be administered by **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council**.

The awards garnered by state Rep. Jim Lynch, state Sen. Mary Jo White and state Sen. Joe Scarnati, “demonstrates the success of two counties working together to improve our communities,” White said

Lynch said the grants “will be put to good use improving the lives of the less fortunate.” Scarnati agreed, saying, “It makes all the hard work worth it when I see people in my district who need it most.”