

WE ARE AT WAR

On Tuesday November 7th, the county was divided by political beliefs as Election Day was underway. But on Wednesday November 8th, the community came together to raise awareness for the war being waged on the destructive drug epidemic that has invaded our nation, communities, and homes. Over 300 people registered to attend the free event hosted by GOAL Magazine and made possible by the generous support of Lead sponsors SecondHalf Coach Wealth Management, Westmoreland Chiropractic & Rehab Associates and Westmoreland County Chamber of Commerce. Wendy Bell moderated the event hosted at St. Vincent College in Latrobe, PA. Numerous speakers from different perspectives on the issue were brought together to share their stories and views of how this epidemic has touched their lives and the lives of others.

As guests arrived, they received take home bags provided by SecondHalf Coach Wealth Management containing the fall issue of GOAL Magazine and materials provided by many local organizations giving hope and resources for those that are at the hands of this epidemic. Organizations that volunteered their time and/or materials for the bags were Mental Health America, Westmoreland Drug Commission, St. Vincent College Prevention Project, Sage's Army, Faith Forward/Angel Arms, Hope in a Bag, SPS Behavioral Health, The Union Mission, New Freedom, Westmoreland Community Action and Gateway Rehab. Cookies, coffee and soft drinks were provided for all attendees.

GOAL Magazine Co-Founder, **William Urbanik** started off the evening by welcoming the crowd and expressing how and why the idea of this event came to life. It all started at a golf outing he attended with Judge Anthony Bompiani. Bill and his good friend Judge Bompiani talked a lot about the issue as the continuous epidemic was sweeping our area. During this particular outing, the Judge had to leave early due to the arrest of a highly known local heroin dealer. At the time, Bill simply knew what a lot of other people know: there is a drug problem in our area. Through the course



of their conversation on the green, Bill realized that calling this issue a "problem" was a huge understatement. He was in disbelief at how severely devastating drugs were in our area and how many were being impacted and wanted to get involved. He immediately came back to his office and discussed it with Anthony Slezak, Co-Founder and CFO of GOAL Magazine. They felt they wanted to provide a community service event educating the public on what is really happening in their neighborhoods. Bill continued working to plan this event with other team members Jessica Urbanik and Tawnya Rockwell. Through meetings with potential speakers and really diving into the issue, he came to the conclusion that the drug epidemic is the single greatest threat to our national security and standard of living. The GOAL Magazine team decided that it would be most effective to bring everyone they spoke to into the event so that attendees could find awareness and maybe come to the same realization after hearing from all these different perspectives.



Wendy Bell, the event moderator, is supremely talented in her unbelievable gift to identify with her audience as if each and every member of the audience was her good friend. She started the evening by sharing her story about her coverage of the Drug Overdose

Awareness Day in St. Clair Park where family and friends placed the shoes of lost loved ones in a temporary memorial and shared their stories. Wendy also told the story of her neighbor's 26-year-old daughter who was wheeled out of her home on a stretcher after a drug incident, a moment which opened her eyes to the fact that the drug epidemic does not discriminate. Everyone is a target regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, wealth, education, political ideology or zip code. She stated that the drug epidemic is killing our people, our neighbors at an alarming frequency. She explained how many of these people that have lost loved ones, despite their paralyzing pain, are turning their grief into a message. Several of them would speak later in the evening. Wendy performed a Q&A with each of the speakers after they were done sharing their stories.

Dr. Eric Kocian, Assistant Professor at St. Vincent College, and Dr. John Lewis, Author and Criminology Professor at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, shared a power point presentation illuminating statistics



from a study they, along with some of Dr. Kocian's students, conducted on 158 heroin addicts from the area who volunteered to participate. Their findings were presented to high-ranking FBI and DEA officials. The addicts were asked what state of mind they were in when they decided to try drugs for the first time, what their environment was like, about their religious beliefs, family life, etc. The statistics were alarming and really opened the audience's eyes to the existence of drug use and abuse in childhood as well as the circumstances that may commonly lead to heroin use.

The County Representatives were then brought up to the stage to discuss how their daily work day is affected by the epidemic. **Gina Cerilli**, Westmoreland County Commissioner, explained how funding the stop of the drug epidemic with programs like Narcan clinics are draining our county resources. Gina stated that 1 in 4 people are affected by the drug epidemic and cited her own story of losing a family member to heroin. When Gina ran and won her position three years ago, removing the stigma against heroin addicts was one of her main objectives.



Anthony Bompiani, Westmoreland County Magisterial Judge, discussed how simply locking up drug users and the dealers that are preying on people is not the solution. He referenced the epidemic as "seeing someone drowning and either throwing them a life jacket or a cement block." He wants to help decipher "the people that need help and the people that need removed from our streets."



Westmoreland County Detective **Tony Marcocci** brought along actual heroin stamp bags in their obscure packaging for his presentation to teach awareness of the appearance of the drug. He described the likelihood that many parents may have pulled what looked like pieces of paper out of their kids' pant pockets while doing laundry and had no idea it was heroin. He truly illuminated the need for further public education on identifying the drug.

