

GOAL Magazine Presents Our 1st Annual Symposium



On Tuesday November 7th, 2017 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 Sponsor 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 and CEO, **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 and 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, did 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.

Executive Director of the Drug Overdose Task Force, **Tim Phillips** talked about how he came straight to the event from a

funeral of someone that had passed away from a heroin overdose. With burdened expression, he stated, "I am tired of going to funerals." He shared with the audience that if he hadn't found faith back in 1988, he could have also ended up as a sad statistic. He is in long term recovery from addiction and is active in a 12-step fellowship. He was impressed by how many new and fresh faces he saw in the audience at the event and expressed his excitement at the number of people that are banning together in the battle against addiction.



Mikayla Musgrove, volunteer and spokesperson for Hope in a Bag, talked about how "One Little Girl, One Big Heart and Hope and Bag" got started. Mikayla, along with founder Renah, several other young girls and their families in the Elizabeth area, take the time to assemble bags with items donated by people across the state to give out to recovering addicts. Items include but are not limited to body wash, toothpaste, playing cards and a bible. In their short time as a non-profit organization, they have distributed 1,600 bags to recovering addicts across Pa, WV and Ohio. To learn more about their efforts you can find them on Facebook "Hope in a Bag, Operation Recovery Compassion".

Michelle Schwartzmier brought tears to the eyes of everyone in attendance as she shared her daughter's sad battle with addiction. She began with a statement that her daughter is not just a statistic or a number, "My daughter wasn't a junkie or a troll under a bridge, she was loved." After losing her 20-year-old daughter nine months ago, Michelle started the non-profit "Another Chance for Casey." Casey Schwartzmier was the 12th overdose death in Allegheny County this year. Prior to her death, just weeks before she passed, Casey had a discussion with Michelle and explained that if heroin ever got the best of her, she wanted her mother to be honest when discussing her death and to not put "Passed away suddenly" in her obituary. Casey requested, "Tell them my story." Not long after, Casey was planning to go back to rehab, though she never made it as she overdosed in her bedroom next to her packed suit case. Michelle kept her promise to Casey and wrote a beautiful and honest obituary of her daughter's story which immediately went viral, allowing Casey's story to impact the lives of people across the nation. Michelle now speaks to groups, spreading Casey's story and showing how a mother's love can move mountains.





Dawn Hennessy, founder of Faith Forward and Angel Arms Infant Recovery, shared her story about the organization's objective to raise community awareness in regard to the children effected by addiction. She said that 1 in 5 children are born into a family with addiction. She shared a personal story about a pregnant woman she met four years earlier with whom she developed a supportive relationship. When the baby was born, the woman asked Dawn to care for her baby until she got her life in order. Dawn has since adopted that child, a step which largely moved her to develop Angel Arms.

17. By that point he had been using heroin for three years since he initially snorted it at age 14. Prior to losing his son, he also lost a stepson to heroin. Carmen speaks regularly at events similar to this event in hopes that Sage's story could help others avoid the same fate. One of his greatest objectives is to eradicate the stigmas that prevent society from seeing the true national issue of opiate/opioid abuse and addiction.



Carmen Capozzi approached the podium and said two words sternly as he lifted a photo of his son, "Sage Capozzi." Carmen shared that he nor anyone even knew his son was on drugs until he got in trouble at the age of



Our Keynote Speaker **Jimmy Woods** brought hope and plenty of smiles to the crowd as he shared his story on stage. His story was so moving and unique that by the end, we all grew to admire his strength and mission. Jimmy is a recovering addict and owner of Mission Mahi Food Truck. Jimmy told how getting hit by a car going 25 mph in 2013 was the changing point in his life. Being in the hospital forced him to quit drinking but he then became addicted to pain medication. He shared how his life hit rock bottom while in rehab where he had a spiritual experience that saved him. While serving specialty fish tacos from his food truck, mostly in McCandless, he shares his story and employs recovering addicts to help each other.

If you would like to donate to one of these charities, please visit our website at <http://www.go2goalus.com/goal-drug-awareness-symposium>.

As of November 30, 2017, with one month remaining until the end of year, Westmoreland County sets the drug overdose death record with 179 deaths, surpassing the previous record of 174 set in 2016. While the Drug Symposium event was a huge success producing waves of positive feedback, the struggle is far from over. The people who spoke at the GOAL event are committed soldiers in this war. We were honored to help give them a platform to not only raise awareness, but hopefully inspire others to join the charge and find a way to become a soldier in the war and make a difference. Our country, our communities, our neighborhoods and our homes will continue to suffer. This epidemic must no longer remain a problem that is whispered about behind closed doors. We are at war against the opioid epidemic and joining this war is the calling of our time. We must come together and fight so that all our lives and our children's lives can have a future free from the grips of this vicious force of evil.