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***Press Release***



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**Lehigh County Executive Armstrong Delivers**

**2023 State of the County Address**

**Allentown, PA-** On Thursday, February 23rd, Lehigh County Executive, Phillips M. Armstrong delivered his 2023 State of the County Address at Coca-Cola Park. The address was presented to community members, business leaders, and government officials. The event was hosted by the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC).

The 2023 State of the County Address covered topics including Lehigh County’s goals and strategic plans for the upcoming year, general infrastructure projects, Cedarbrook Senior Care & Rehabilitation, emergency rental assistance, small business and non-profit grant funding, as well as other highlights from county departments.

In the 2023 address, County Executive Armstrong dedicated his presentation to the residents of Lehigh County, stating:

“The 2023 State of the County Address is dedicated to the people, to show how we as their county government will continue to work for them in the face of new and unprecedented challenges.” He said, “This is the time to share with our residents what we have planned for Lehigh County, and as County Executive, it is an honor to present these plans that will continue to shape and grow our community as we look to the future.”

The following is a synopsis of Armstrong’s 2023 State of the County Address.

As we move beyond the pandemic and get back to the business of working for Lehigh County’s residents, we are still finalizing uses for the last of our COVID relief funds. Lehigh County received just under $72 million in American Rescue funding, and we are in the final stages of putting that money to great use. With the help of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, we used slightly less than $10 million of that money to help more than 800 small businesses stay afloat during the pandemic.

With the help of Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, we kept several residents in their homes during the pandemic. We are on track to distribute all of our $44 million allocation within the next few months to help more than 5,000 families. The United Way of the Lehigh Valley also helped us to distribute slightly more than $5 million between COVID CARES and American Rescue funding to more than a hundred local non-profits to continue providing services to residents who need them.

The County continues to invest in its infrastructure by prioritizing necessary expansions, renovations, and repairs throughout the community. Preparations are underway to replace and repair multiple Lehigh County Bridges, including the Wire Mill Bridge, Walnut Street Bridge, Geiger’s Covered Bridge, and the Wehr Mill Covered Bridge. The nearly $15 million major renovation plan for Lehigh County’s Historic Courthouse, originally built in 1812, was completed in late 2022. The Historic Courthouse is open for County Judiciary business, and an official grand re-opening will be scheduled later this year.

The large Cedarbrook Allentown E-Wing renovation project, which is the replacement of the oldest beds at Cedarbrook with a modern 240 bed wing with better amenities and a higher quality of life for the residents has moved from the complicated site-work phase, to the building phase with the recent demolition of the front entrance and the digging of the footprint of the new wing. It is a very difficult project to manage on a 178-year-old, fully operational, and busy nursing home campus. With massive amounts of coordination and tight management, the project continues to move forward with a projected 2024 opening.

Despite the immense difficulties of the pandemic and national labor market crisis, Cedarbrook continues to operate at a level of quality deemed by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to be four stars above average. Cedarbrook Fountain Hill continues to be a valuable asset for the county in caring for our elderly citizens in the eastern part of the County. Lehigh County continues to balance taxpayer contributions and resident needs to create a safe environment for the county’s most in need citizens.

Lehigh County’s Department of Farmland Preservation achieved a new milestone and exceeded over 27,000 acres of farmland preservation this year. Over 100 farms were inspected to meet preservation requirements and recent updates to Lehigh County’s Farmland Preservation Program were approved by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Lehigh County constructed the newly designed mountain bike trail in the Trexler Nature Preserve, filled a gap in the D&L trail by opening the trail from Race Street in Catasauqua to Hanover Township Canal Park. Our velodrome, a world leading bike racing facility had a major track renovation completed in 2022.

We’ve had nearly 200 responses from our Emergency Management Operations Team, including: drone, hazardous mitigation, river, height and forest recovery, while answering almost 450,000 calls in our 911 communications center.

In 2022, we started a new program called the Community Corrections Supervision Program. This program places qualifying and appropriate inmates back in the community, living in their approved residence so they can work, support their family and are monitored by a GPS ankle bracelet. The jail has engaged with several community providers and resources to expand and enhance the programming offered to the population.

The Public Defender and District Attorney are working on bringing a Pardon Project to the citizens of Lehigh County. The Office of the Public Defender also continues to host biannual Community Outreach Days that provide free necessities and services to the people of our County.

The Lehigh County Department of Human Services provides continuous, 24/7 response and assistance to county residents and their families. Services include continuous mental health support, assisting families with housing needs and helping families reunite and stay out of the child welfare system, as well as maintaining county recovery programs.

The Lehigh County Office of Aging and Adult Services is committed to supporting and empowering the well-being of adults of all ages. Programs provided are for participants aged 60+ to assist them in maintaining independence.

Over the last five years, due to the decisions of our HR team, we have been able to control our Healthcare and Prescription spending levels. In 2022 our active employees began receiving Prescription Drug Coverage from Capital RX of New York City. The savings are $1.5 million a year. In 2023, 670 of our grandfathered retirees and their spouses moved into a Medicare Advantage Plan from Highmark named Freedom Blue. Their benefits were enhanced with vision and hearing coverage. Saving roughly $500,000 a year.

Lehigh County’s 2023 administrative goals include promoting sustainability and addressing issues associated with climate change. The first step being greater energy conservation at all our County owned facilities. We are looking to continue moving forward in preparing to convert our 911 communication system to digital, and to revamp our employee personnel and policy manual. Lehigh County will continue to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion and maintain a culture that values and supports our employees.

Lehigh Valley Economic & Development hosted the 2023 State of the County. Workforce Board Lehigh Valley is the Presenting Sponsor, Lehigh Valley International Airport is the Gold Sponsor and St. Luke’s University Health Network is the Event Sponsor.adr

For more information, please contact Public Information Officer, Adrianna Calderon at (610)782.3002.

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