**(610)782.3002**

 **COUNTY OF LEHIGH**

 ***Office of Public Information***

**17 S. 7th Street, Suite 436**

**Allentown, PA, 18101**

***Press Release***



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** **CONTACT:** Adrianna Calderon February 22, 2024 AdriannaCalderon@lehighcounty.org

**Lehigh County Executive Armstrong Delivers**

**2024 State of the County Address**

**Allentown, PA-** On Thursday, February 22nd, Lehigh County Executive, Phillips M. Armstrong delivered his 2024 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 Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce (GLVCC).

The speech covered topics including Lehigh County’s goals and strategic plans for the upcoming year, general infrastructure projects, continuing upgrades to the 9-1-1 Communications Center, small business and non-profit grant funding, as well as other highlights from county departments.

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

“We will always focus on people, purpose, and impact.” He said, “With this in mind, I can assure the residents of Lehigh County we are working together to ensure Lehigh County continues to be an excellent place to live, and work.”

The following is a synopsis of Armstrong’s 2024 State of the County Address.

As we close the books on 2023 and move into the new year, it’s time to reflect on our past successes and look forward to what the future holds for Lehigh County. I am proud to say that prudent fiscal management and tightening our belts, when necessary, throughout 2023 has allowed this administration to present a balanced budget with no tax increase for the fifth year in a row, despite costs and expenses rising exponentially.

The county continues to invest in its infrastructure by prioritizing necessary expansions, renovations, and repairs throughout the community. The Wire Mill Bridge that connects Allentown’s south side to its vibrant center city has reopened, we’ve completed the renovation of Lehigh County’s award-winning Historical Courthouse and we are continuing upgrades to Cedarbrook Nursing Home.

We’ve recently announced our newest 9-1-1 Communications Center update, which allows video access to the site via caller cameras and live streaming. Lehigh County is working with vendor “Prepared Live”, who are supporting this project with zero additional cost to the county. The caller, with 911 leadership, can video share information to support the emergency response. This will not affect normal call operating standards, but will save time when every moment counts.

Lehigh County’s Department of Farmland Preservation achieved a new milestone and exceeded over 28,000 acres of farmland preservation this year, with over 350 farms preserved.

Through the American Rescue Plan, we completed the issuance of $10 million to Lehigh County small businesses who struggled during the pandemic as well as $3 million to nonprofit organizations who helped people through the pandemic and recovery.

In 2023, Lehigh County received $17 million in funding from a $26 billion nationwide opioid settlement with major drug distributors and pharmaceutical manufacturers. We have worked hard to put that funding to good use in the prevention and treatment of opioid addiction. We created a plan to provide an opioid treatment center in the northern section of our county that provides family counseling to support addicts seeking recovery, medically assisted treatment programs for addicts in our jail, and we are increasing our detox facility from 34 beds to 50 beds. We are also creating a youth advertising plan to help deter school-aged children from becoming involved with opioids.

We announced our Lehigh Valley Breathes project, led by Lehigh and Northampton Counties, to obtain and communicate localized information and particulate air pollution in the Lehigh Valley. The primary purpose is to provide policy makers and citizens with the information needed to help improve the air we all breathe. The project is designed to enable and engage citizens in learning about air quality and participating in decisions that affect air quality.

Since the end of the pandemic, our Public Defender’s office has sponsored regular Community Outreach Days, where a number of agencies and organizations provide needed services, information, and resources to the public. Our residents have received information about legal services, mental health, housing, drug and alcohol treatment, employment and are offered free legal services from the Public Defender’s office.

This year, through the cooperation of the District Attorney’s Office, Clerk of Courts and other Lehigh County organizations, we have begun a Pardon Project whose goal is to give second chances to nonviolent low-level offenders to aid them in getting employment, housing, and education. The potential benefits of a pardon and expungement are significant and can create a range of opportunities that may not have been available otherwise. Lehigh County wants to help its residents realize this opportunity.

These great accomplishments did not happen alone. They happen because of the great work of our more than two thousand employees and the great partnership we have had with our commissioners, row officers, and judiciary.

Looking ahead to 2024, we have put funding in place for a Lehigh Valley Housing Equity Plan that will provide our residents with a plan to meet rising housing demands. In addition, we will partner with a national housing expert in housing development to organize a multi-day workshop with key government, non-profit, and private sector professionals to develop strategies to locate more housing where it is most needed. It is critical that we continue to put forth efforts to close the income/housing mis-match that continues to grow.

Lehigh County will continue to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion and maintain a culture that values and supports our employees.

The Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce hosted the 2024 State of the County Address.

Workforce Board Lehigh Valley is the Presenting Sponsor, Natural Food Group is the Platinum Sponsor.

Our Gold Sponsors are Astound Business Solutions and Lehigh Valley International Airport.

Our Silver Sponsors are: Cornerstone Asset Management, McGriff Insurance Services, Service Electric Business, and St. Lukes University Health Network.

Our Bronze Sponsor is Equinox Benefits Consulting.

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