

# Bucks County Opportunity Council Celebrates 11 Self-Sufficient Graduates

by MICHELE BUONO

"When I first came to them, they asked what they could do to help me. What did I need to succeed? Now I can say, 'what can I do to help you?'" - Vivian Crossman, recipient of the 2011 Community Service Award.

Over 200 people gathered at Spring Mill Manor in Ivyland to celebrate the Bucks County Opportunity Council (BCOC) Economic Self-Sufficiency Graduation on Wednesday, October 12. They came together to honor the hard-working, motivated people who were on or eligible for welfare, but were committed to working to gain the education, skills, and employment necessary to permanently leave poverty. Also honored were program alumni who are "giving back" to the community.

Eleven graduates were celebrated. Their stories are inspiring; the single mother who worked both a full-time and a part-time job while going to school, the woman who applied for close to a thousand jobs over the course of two years looking for a job, the woman who lost her home and had to live with friends while searching for employment. These people lived at the edge of desperation, not able to support themselves or their children. Through the Economic Self-Sufficiency program they acquire the education, skills and employment to permanently leave poverty as opposed to merely cope in it. According to Outreach Director David Ford, "The program transforms lives and often ends a cycle of poverty that existed

for generations."

Participants spend an average of two to five years in the program. In order to graduate, certain benchmarks must be achieved, including employment with a family-sustaining wage, a balanced household budget, affordable housing, and perhaps most importantly, freedom from government welfare programs. Graduates are not dependent on cash welfare assistance, food stamps, or subsidized housing. Since its inception in 1997, 231 families have graduated the program.

This is not an entitlement program. A combination of public funding and private contributions from results-minded donors drive its success. The program ultimately save \$4 in cash welfare subsidies for every \$1 invested in a successful graduate. Executive Director Roger Collins describes it as "economic development one family at a time."

Vivian's story is an inspiring one. While attending nursing school, she knew she had to remove her three children and herself from an abusive relationship situation, but how would she support her family and go to school? She knew that she needed to finish her studies so that she could earn a certain level of income to provide for her family, but it was a daunting task. Fortunately, a fellow classmate told her about the BCOC and Vivian enrolled in the Self-Sufficiency Program.

It was a tough call to make. "No one wants to have to ask for help. No one wants to say they're poor". Vivian made the call and took the first steps to self-sufficiency. She met with her new coach,

who would help her along the way. Working with BCOC has given her life skills, courage, and on-going emotional support to get where she is today. There were challenges and setbacks, but Vivian stuck it out and finished school, fulfilling her dream of becoming a registered nurse.

Vivian graduated the Economic Self-Sufficiency Program in 2003. She now serves on the BCOC Board, helping others who can use a hand and more. Today, she is living in Milford Township and works as a nurse, as well as volunteering. Vivian recalls a 7 year-old boy that she met while helping with BCOC's annual Give a Christmas campaign. His Christmas wish was a bed of his own. His mother was a single parent and could not afford to buy him his own bed. Vivian was so touched and knew she had to do something. With the help of a friend and Sleepys, Vivian made sure that this boy would have his own bed.

It's not unusual for graduates to come back to the Opportunity Council and help others with their journeys. The BCOC coaches become a family for those they help. As Vivian says, the emotional support is so very important for those going through tough times.

If you would like more information about the Bucks County Opportunity Council and its programs, please call their Quakertown office (serving the Upper Bucks area) at 215-536-6106. Their office is located at 347 New Street in Quakertown. You can also find them online at [www.bcoc.org](http://www.bcoc.org).



Community Service Award recipients, Terry Talto and Vivian Crossman

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## Pennridge Chamber of Commerce Presents Social Media Seminar

The Pennridge Chamber is pleased to present the second seminar in their Seminar Series-"Social Media and Your Business." The seminar will take place on November 9th from 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the First Savings office located at 219 S. 9th Street in Perkasie. A continental breakfast will be served beginning at 8:30 a.m. with the program beginning promptly at 9 a.m. Four knowledgeable panel-

ists will discuss one of the biggest avenues for business networking and business advertising today... Social Media!

The cost of the seminar is \$25 per person. Please register by November 4th by contacting the Chamber by phone at 215-257-5390, or e-mail [pennridgecc@pennridge.com](mailto:pennridgecc@pennridge.com). You do not need to be a Chamber member to participate.

## Senate Approves Bill Providing For Valley Forge Appointments

The Pennsylvania State Senate approved Senate Bill 560, legislation introduced by Senator Bob Mensch (R-24) creating a new program for legislative appointments to the Valley Forge Military Academy & College (VFMA&C).

The bill now goes to the State House of Representatives for consideration.

"Valley Forge has a long tradition of providing character-based education within an academic and military environment," said Senator Mensch, a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. "The institute provides the training and discipline that builds a solid foundation enabling young men and women to be successful in a wide variety of career paths. Its students have gone on to become military leaders, business and industry executives, government officials, professional athletes Rhoades Scholars and White House Fellows."

VFMA&C is a two-year, transfer program from which almost all students move on to four-year colleges and universities. Valley Forge is also the only institution in the Northeastern United States offering an Early Commissioning Program, which al-

lows successful candidates to earn a commission as a second lieutenant in the Army in two years rather than the standard four years through ROTC programs at other colleges and universities.

The State Military College Legislative Appointment Initiative Program created under Senate Bill 560 would allow each member of the legislature to create a selection committee to recommend an eligible student for enrollment at Valley Forge. The State Ethics Commission would be charged with developing guidelines to govern the establishment and functions of the selection committee in order to prevent conflicts of interests or other potential ethics violations.

"The House of Representatives adopted a Resolution last session which allows each member of the House to appoint a qualified constituent to the freshman class at Valley Forge each year and they are eligible to receive a scholarship funded entirely by the institution," Senator Mensch said. "My legislation builds on that by providing for the selection process in statute and allowing for an appointment by every member of the General Assembly."