FVUW breakfast presents heart warming examples of healing

By Pat Barcas
Staff writer

Community members packed the room at Piper's Banquets May 17 for the Fox Valley United Way's annual award breakfast, recognizing people for their outstanding volunteer work, as well as listening to a few life changing stories of people that have been helped by the United Way.

The group is celebrating its 90th year of operations in Aurora, and Fox Valley United Way CEO Michael Meyer expounded on the launch of the SPARK program. Strong, Prepared and Ready for Kindergarten is an early childhood initiative which will ensure that every pre-school child in Aurora is ready when they attend school.

Maryanne Locklin, associate professor of nursing at Aurora University, was honored with the Live United award for spearheading the SPARK collaboration between agencies.

Funding for the program is being provided through the Dunham Fun, which presented the United Way with a $250,000 check.

"This is my favorite day and favorite event of the year," said Meyer. "This gives us an opportunity to shed a spotlight on all of you."

One spotlight was shown on Peter (last name withheld), a man who was a client of Hope For Tomorrow, an Aurora organization that is partnered with Fox Valley United Way to fight addiction.

Peter said he started off with cocaine in the 1980s, then met a woman in rehab who introduced him to heroin.

"This started a nightmare of seven years," he said. "I was feeding my vein before feeding my child."

After 16 months at Hope For Tomorrow, Peter said he is a changed man.

"I learned how to be a son, a friend, a responsible human being," he said. "I'm confident in saying if it weren't for Hope For Tomorrow, I'd be dead."

Another speaker, Jennie (last name withheld), told of her struggle with sexual abuse and how Mutual Ground of Aurora helped turn her life around. She suffered through the sexual abuse of her stepfather for a decade.

"Representatives from Mutual Ground came to my school to talk. It gave me a glimmer of hope for the first time," she said.

Jennie said her counselor, Donna, gave her the courage to tell her mom about the abuse.

"Do you want to be a victim, or a survivor?" Donna asked Jennie.

After pressing charges against her stepfather, Jennie said her life changed.

Pat Barcas photo

Fox Valley United Way CEO Michael Meyer addresses the crowd May 17 during the annual awards breakfast.

"They saved my life, if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be here. I'm a mother, I'm a wife, and a college graduate," said Jennie.

Other awards presented were the Outstanding Community Volunteer award to Bryan Basilico, longtime United Way board member, as well as the Rita Anderson Smith award presented to Melinda James, past board of directors chair.

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