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UPSIDE ALLENTOWN REPORTS ON ITS FOURTH YEAR

With Two Years Remaining in its Six-Year Plan, the Focus Shifts to the Housing Stock

“We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten. Don't let yourself be lulled into inaction. -- Bill Gates

Four years into a six-year campaign, Upside Allentown presented its annual report to the community on how it spent more than \$500,000 in corporate contributions in 2017-2018 fiscal year to strengthen the neighborhoods and improve the quality of life around the Neighborhood Improvement Zone. Significant changes and accomplishments in the last four years include an Arts and Culture initiative that is increasing the accessibility and visibility of arts and culture opportunities in the downtown, dozens of façade improvements to residences and businesses, lighting and parks improvements that increase quality of life and provide safer neighborhoods, reduction in crime in the center city, and increased engagement of youth with the Allentown Police Department.

These achievements are the culmination of four years of work from hundreds of volunteers, corporations, foundations, trusts, private funders, and non-profit agencies.

Leaders of the group held a press conference in Allentown today that featured youth who live in the neighborhood, citing reduced crime and more constructive activities in which to participate. Middle-schoolers Justin Williams, Marisa Price, Charlie Strzelecki, Yaciada Hernandez and Pedro LeDee participated, touting the higher visibility of police in the neighborhoods, the Youth Police Academy, and new arts programs funded by Upside Allentown.

The group also announced its plans for the fifth year of the six-year campaign, which will shift in favor of improving the housing stock and engaging parents in their children's education.

Jill Pereira, vice president education of the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, commented on the significance of a quality public education as key to the future of any viable community. Stating that no parent wants to send their child to an underperforming school, and noted the importance of parents speaking up on their children's behalf. “Parents of more affluent suburban children would never accept anything but an outstanding education for their kids and actively advocate for that while the voices of urban and low income parents are often silenced by a lack of experience in standing up



for the best interests of their children. That,” she said, “is one of the reasons why resource and outcome disparities exist and something we expect to be addressed in the coming years with the Parenting Network project Upside Allentown is supporting.”

Alan Jennings, Executive Director of the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, reported that, while improving the housing stock is, perhaps, the most pressing need in the neighborhood, the cost is so prohibitive that very little funding from Upside has been committed to the issue in the first four years. Finally, though, enough funding has been cobbled together, enabling the group to develop a block-by-block approach to begin taking on this challenge.

Jennings reported that his agency expects to spend more than \$1 million on the effort over the next two years. “This neighborhood,” he said, “deserves more of our attention, more of our creativity, and more of our resources.”

The group also announced its plans to continue to commit resources to arts, public safety and literacy, as well as small business development.

Mayor Ray O’Connell thanked the group for its enthusiastic commitment to strengthening the quality of life for the residents of Allentown’s downtown neighborhoods, noting, in particular, the involvement of neighborhood residents in the effort.

Upside Allentown is an initiative of the Community Action Development Corporation of Allentown, a subsidiary of the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley. It is funded by a consortium of local businesses, the contributions from which are supported by tax credits from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development’s Neighborhood Partnership Program. BB&T commits \$150,000 each year, PPL and TD Bank each contribute \$100,000 and Alvin H Butz, City Center Investment Corporation, Lafayette Ambassador Bank and Wells Fargo each support the project with \$50,000 per year.

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