



New headquarters open for Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency



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AUBURN | Five social service agencies that assist residents when they need help the most have found shelter under one roof.

The Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency and four agencies under its wide umbrella of services now call 10,000-square feet of office space at 89 York St. home.

About 100 people attended an open house, ribbon-cutting ceremony and Voices of Poverty

Speakout Wednesday at the new facility.

Refurbished offices in the two-story office building, furnished entirely with donations from Empire Federal Credit Union, now house Domestic Violence Services, Family Development, Healthy Families, Energy Services and C/SCAA's administrative headquarters.

"It's been a longstanding dream to consolidate our programs under one roof to better serve our constituents," said Laurie Piccolo, C/SCAA executive director.

At the outdoor reception, Auburn Mayor Mike Quill stepped to the microphone to welcome the agencies to the neighborhood and proclaim May Community Action Awareness month in Auburn.

He lauded the C/SCAA's efforts, since 1965, to assist Cayugans in need "to achieve and sustain self-sufficiency ... assuring that all citizens can live in dignity."

Speakers that followed Quill's proclamation told of personal experiences of being impoverished at various times in their lives. For three of them the local community action agencies saved them, they said.

Tim Donovan is a longtime local resident who on Nov. 1, 2006 "hit bottom."

His story is a long one, the recovering alcoholic told the rapt crowd. He shared parts of it for which he received direct assistance from C/SCAA. He described long, stressful days during which he connected with an employee named Jennifer. She helped him secure housing, a job and drove him to Alcoholic Anonymous meetings and to food pantries.

"It's not easy to ask for help," the retired corrections officer said.

Now, Donovan sits on the C/SCAA board and gives back as often as he can to the Auburn community, which he calls "generous, caring."

His advocacy against poverty and for the county's men, women and families who live close to it or who strive to leave it behind them is widespread and well known.

Karla Digirolomo, president of the New York State Community Action Association, both honored and surprised Donovan when she awarded him its Community Action Vision and Values Award.

Donovan will accept the award that recognizes significant contributions to the Community Action Network and exemplifying the "true meaning of community action" at a June banquet in Alexandria Bay.

Digirolomo coincided her appearance at the Auburn celebration of the C/SCAA's new home with the NYSCAA "From Poverty to Opportunity" tour.

She is passionate about her work with NYSCAA, which was created when former President Lyndon Johnson's passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

Myths of how a person arrives, and remains, within the grip of poverty need to be exposed for the untruths they are. People must be dispelled of the notion that poverty is a result of laziness, an unwillingness to seek education or to find employment, she said.

"We know that's not true," Digirolomo said.

She cautioned against the rise of a political class that doesn't seek to lift the unemployed blue-collar worker by creating jobs and fortifying assistance to the single mother, the hungry child and those vulnerable to poverty's clutch.

"It's a political and social construct we can commit to ending," she said. "In a country as rich and as fortunate as ours, no one should live in poverty."

Who is Cayuga-Seneca Community Action Agency?

The mission of the Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency, Inc. is to respectfully assist people to achieve and sustain self-sufficiency through direct services, education, and community partnerships.

Programs located at 89 York St.:

Domestic Violence Services

- Domestic Violence Intervention Program
- Transitional Housing Assistance Program
- Supervised Visitation/Safe Exchange

Energy Services

- Weatherization Assistance Program

- EmPower NY

Family Development

- Car Seat Distribution

- Emergency Services

- Food Pantry

- Free Clothing

- Homeless Intervention and Case Management

- Online Food Stamp Application

- Supportive Housing for Young Adults

- Health Insurance Access

Healthy Families

Healthy Families Cayuga/Seneca is a free and voluntary program designed to provide support and information to new and expectant parents of all ages. It is comprised of several components, including providing the most up-to-date information on child health and development, promoting parent-child interaction, and supporting and assisting families to achieve and sustain self-sufficiency.

Source: <http://cscaa.com/home.html>

New York State Community Action Association

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