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Bucks County Opportunity Council Honors Penn Community Bank as 20-Year Champion of Self Sufficiency

Early support for Economic Self-Sufficiency Program has transformed lives by helping Bucks County residents leave poverty, for good

DOYLESTOWN, Pa. (October 2018) – For 20 years, Penn Community Bank has invested in a program that has improved the lives, and therefore the communities, of about 300 Bucks County residents, nearly all of them vulnerable women and children. Now, Bucks County Opportunity Council is recognizing the bank for those decades of support with its first-ever Self Sufficiency Champion award.

Bucks County Opportunity Council presented the award to Penn Community Bank at its Economic Self Sufficiency Program Graduation event, held Oct. 3 at Northampton Valley Country Club. The annual event celebrates the graduates' successful completion of the program designed to help participants leave poverty behind for good.

"Penn Community Bank and its leaders, particularly director Mark Worthington, helped lead BCOC's efforts to establish the Economic Self Sufficiency Program, and without their enthusiastic and consistent support over the years, the program simply would not have been as successful as it has been," said Erin Lukoss, Executive Director of Bucks County Opportunity Council. "They truly have modeled what it means to be a local business committed to giving our struggling neighbors a hand up, breaking the cycle of poverty for this generation and for those to come."

BCOC's Economic Self Sufficiency program was launched in 1997. At the time, Worthington served on the boards of the Opportunity Council and of First Federal of Bucks County. He believed strongly in the self-sufficiency program and stepped up to support it personally, encouraging First Federal to do the same as an organization.

When First Federal joined fellow mutual bank First Savings Bank of Perkasie in 2015 to form Penn Community Bank, the new organization continued that support. Over the years, the bank has donated \$200,000 to Bucks County Opportunity Council and bank executives such as Jeane M. Vidoni have served on the council's board of directors and

volunteered in other capacities. Penn Community Bank also plays an important role in the program by offering employment opportunities to self-sufficiency program participants.

“Through our decades of involvement with Bucks County Opportunity Council, we’ve seen how education and empowerment can transform the lives of people who are struggling,” said Vidoni. “Penn Community Bank’s ongoing belief in and support of the Economic Self Sufficiency Program is one of our proudest accomplishments as a community-focused financial institution, and we hope to continue this successful partnership for many years to come.”

Since 1997, the Economic Self Sufficiency Program has graduated 299 people in Bucks County, according to [a 2018 report analyzing the program’s impact](#). Of those, 9 out of 10 graduates are women, and 7 out of 10 have children. Before enrolling in the program, most participants – nearly 8 out of 10, in 2016 – depend upon welfare subsidies to survive. Before enrolling in the program, the average graduate had earned just \$11,099 annually, far below the poverty threshold.

Graduates spend an average of three years in the program. To successfully complete the program, participants must meet 10 benchmarks that are recognized nationally as the standards of self-sufficiency, including having safe housing, reliable transportation, health insurance for every family member, full employment, and no reliance on welfare subsidies.

The education, job training, life skills, and coaching that participants receive make a measurable difference in their lives. Every graduate became gainfully employed and their annual income increased significantly. In 2016, for example, an average graduate’s income after exiting the program was \$46,322, about four times as much as they had earned previously.

The life-altering effects do not end with the graduate. The 2018 report showed that the 299 graduates were part of households that included 845 people, total – 464 of whom were children. Children who grow up in families that leave poverty experience significantly more opportunities throughout life than children who remain in poverty. As adults, they earn an average of \$7,000 more in annual family income, helping to break the cycle of poverty for their own children.

“The Economic Self Sufficiency Program has transformed lives, while saving an estimated \$12 million in government assistance over the past 20 years,” said Vidoni, who serves as chair of the Opportunity Council’s board of directors. “All of us in Bucks County benefit when our neighbors move beyond surviving to thriving.”

PHOTO CAPTION: Penn Community Bank team members gather to accept the first-ever Self Sufficiency Champion award from Bucks County Opportunity Council, in recognition of the bank’s 20 years of support of the Council’s Economic Self Sufficiency Program, which helps graduates leave poverty, for good.

About Penn Community: [Penn Community Bank](#) holds more than \$2 billion in assets, employs more than 300 people, and offers banking, lending, insurance and investments at 25 bank branches and two administrative centers throughout Bucks and Montgomery counties, Pennsylvania. As an independent, mutual financial institution, Penn Community Bank is not publicly traded and operates with its long-term mission in mind: to help businesses grow and prosper, to provide financial resources to individuals and families throughout their lifetimes, to strengthen the local economy, and to partner with local organizations to act as a catalyst for positive growth in every market it serves.

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