

Online data to help groups' focus

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AUBURN — The United Way of Cayuga County unveiled a new online statistical community profile Thursday, replete with information it says will help nonprofits, private businesses and governments sharpen their focus.

The data comes from a recently completed \$104,000 study, commissioned by the United Ways of Cayuga and Seneca counties and executed by the Rochester-based Center for Governmental Research.

It comprises 70 indicators in seven categories: children and youth, economics, demographics, education, financial self-sufficiency, health and safety and housing.

Data from Cayuga County can be compared against Seneca, Onondaga, Oswego, Ontario and Wayne counties, as well as New York (excluding New York City) and the country.

The information itself is not new, but the point of the project, presented Thursday afternoon at the annual Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce Economic Forecast Luncheon, was to pull it all together at a central, user-friendly location.

“The advantage is that it’s all in one spot and there’s local ownership,” United Way of Cayuga County Executive Director Tim Kelly said. “This lets our communities do a higher level of work.”

The profile, posted at www.cayugasenecaprofile.org, includes good news and bad news.

On the positive side, Cayuga County has favorable rates of homeownership and affordable housing compared to state and national averages, and the crime rate is significantly lower.

At the same time, only 18 percent of Cayuga County adults have a bachelor’s degree compared to 31 percent statewide, and there are more single-parent families and children living in poverty.

The hope is that the study will help service organizations decide which areas need the most attention and develop a more quantitative approach to solving them.

“This becomes the centerpiece of having conversations,” said Barbara Bowen, director of the Human Services Coalition. “If you have a program on poverty, having the stats at any given time

is very helpful. It shows the needs and the potential demand. We can then hopefully develop a shared understanding of what the data means.”

Erika Rosenberg of the Center for Governmental Research said that other communities have used similar studies to achieve dramatic improvements in social and economic problems.

For instance, Jacksonville, Fla. was able to cut its teen birth rate in half after a sustained campaign.

“It all starts with the data,” Rosenberg said. “It’s not opinion, it’s not anecdotes, it’s not hearsay.”

The profile also has potential application for economic development and business growth, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Andrew Fish said.

“This becomes another tool in the box helping businesses decide to move here, stay here and expand here,” he said.

The study will be renewed in 2013 under the current contract. Kelly said he hoped it will be revisited again after that, at least every few years.

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Grant help coming

The Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce also announced Thursday the creation of the Finger Lakes Grants Information Center, a service to help organizations and businesses with fundraising and grantwriting.

The center, housed at the Chamber of Commerce offices and headed by Ginny Kent, will have workshops on writing grant proposals, finding funding sources and how to serve on a board of directors. It is intended chiefly for nonprofits, towns and villages, volunteer fire departments, educational institutions and for-profit businesses.

There will be a foundation database and a small library of useful materials on site.

A training session is scheduled for 2 to 4 p.m. Feb. 21 at the center’s 2 State St. location in Auburn. The center officially opens March 1 and will be open during regular business hours.