

January 1936

# 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Newsletter

March 2026

# COMMUNITY CHEST IS FOUNDED

## The Timeless Art of Giving: Support for Local Health, Wellness, and Social Services

In January 1936, in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, a small committee met to discuss the possibility of starting an organization to support local charities. Known then as the Community Chest, Schuylkill County residents donated generously. Their first campaign, dated July 1936, raised \$72,000 (over \$1.6 million, adjusted for inflation) to help support numerous local agencies that offered this help and these services at little or no cost.



As we celebrate our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026, we will be taking a look back through the years at some highlights, memorable personalities and interesting events.

Our Schuylkill News of H.O.P.E. newsletter is proudly sponsored by Lehigh Valley Hospital - Schuylkill

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# Inside SUW

March 2026



tation Manager at Wegmans or volunteering his time, Mark is all about family. He and his wife, Melissa, stay busy keeping up with their daughters, Meredith and Marlena (the "M" family!), and their packed schedule of soccer, basketball, and softball. Whether they are traveling for a game or enjoying a quiet evening, Mark's pride and joy clearly lies in the life he has built with his family and his extended circle of relatives.

A proud Shenandoah native, Mark's heart is firmly rooted in the county. His deep passion for the area was instilled by his parents at a young age and continues to guide his leadership today. He remains a lifelong learner of the community, constantly staying informed on local news and county sports.

Mark brings a genuine, energetic spirit to everything he does - even if his family jokes that he can rarely finish a song before jumping to the next one on his eclectic playlist! From his recent Post Malone concert experience to his current country music phase, his upbeat personality is infectious. We are incredibly fortunate to have a leader who combines professional expertise with a true neighborly heart, and we can't wait to see the impact he'll make this year.

## Meet Our New Board President, Mark Mikita

We are thrilled to introduce Mark Mikita as our 2026 President! Mark's journey with the Schuylkill United Way (SUW) began right at his workplace, where the energy of SUW presenters and the camaraderie of campaign breakfasts inspired him to get involved.

After joining the team, he was moved

by the Tour of H.O.P.E., seeing firsthand how our partner agencies stretch every dollar to make a massive impact. He steps into this role with a clear mission: to keep that momentum going and ensure our community remains supported, resilient, and strong.

When he isn't serving as the transpor-

## Schuylkill United Way Staff

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### Becky Woods

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### Jeanie Purcell

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"Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does."  
- William James

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# Inside SUW

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## 2026-2027 SUW Officers

**Mark Mikita**  
President  
**Dr. Andrew Smarkanic**  
1st Vice President  
**Becky Devlin**  
2nd Vice President  
**Naomi Ost**  
Treasurer  
**Dominic Sylvester**  
Assistant Treasurer  
**Mike Joyce**  
Secretary

## SUW Board

Mr. Jack Bertolet, Jr.  
Mr. Joe Bessette  
Atty. Jim Bohorad  
Mrs. Deidre Boris  
Ms. Diane Boris  
Mr. Chris Cohoon  
Mr. Chris Dende  
Ms. Becky Devlin  
Mr. Joseph Drasdis, Sr.  
Atty. Ben Forbes  
Mr. John Gleisner  
Mrs. Michelle Hammer  
Mr. Patrick Kane  
Ms. Karen Kenderdine  
Mr. Charles Ladd, IV  
Mr. John Matz  
Mrs. Michele Mickonis  
Mr. Mark Mikita  
Mr. Mark Minnig  
Ms. Gracie Newton  
Mrs. Naomi Ost  
Mr. Ed Redding  
Mr. James Samelko, Jr.  
Dr. Andrew Smarkanic  
Mr. Dominic Sylvester  
Mr. Andrew Umphrey  
Mr. Jeff Wessner  
Mr. Greg "Woody" Woodruff  
Mrs. Olivia Zawatski



Dr. Andrew Smarkanic, SUW 1st Vice President, receiving a campaign Award of Excellence Certificate in 2011 for leading the North Schuylkill School District to record high increases in employee pledges.

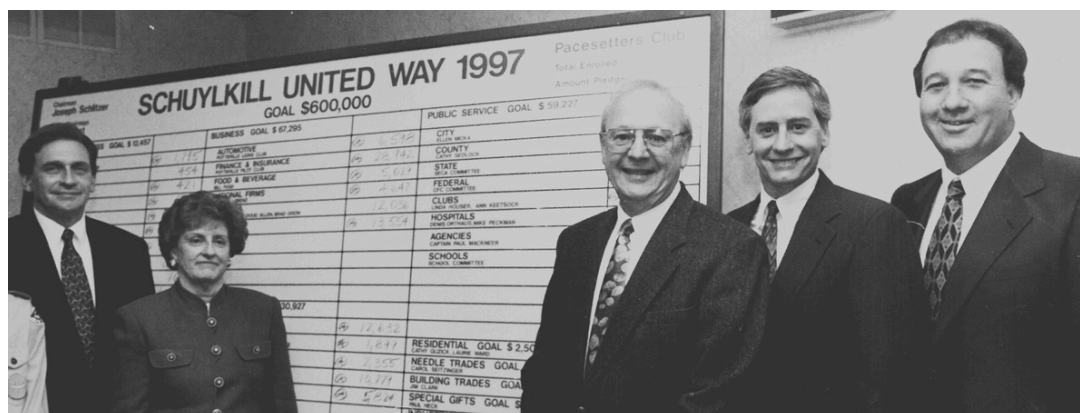
## High School Football Challenge

This idea originated with a comment from then-Campaign Chair Jack Bertolet Jr. about the need to get the county's youth more involved in the Schuylkill United Way. Board member Dr. Andrew Smarkanic ran with that idea and developed the High School Football Challenge. It began in 2017 with only a couple of area teams and rotated fields, but in 2022 the event saw all 14 schools participate. The permanent location is now at Ghosh Orthodontics Field at Spartan Stadium, North Schuylkill High School.

## 31 Years on the SUW Board

Naomi Ost has been a cornerstone of the Schuylkill United Way (SUW) for over three decades, serving as a dedicated board member and volunteer since 1995. Throughout her 31-year tenure, she has played a vital role in the organization's financial and operational oversight, notably holding the position of Treasurer. Her deep commitment is highlighted by her leadership in milestone events, such as chairing the 1998 campaign, and her continued service as an officer for the current term.

Mrs. Naomi Ost, Treasurer, at an event during the 1997 campaign, surrounded by Joe Schlitzer, Dave Holley, Jay Jones, and Frank Staudenmeier.



98.5% of funds raised by SUW stays in Schuylkill County.

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# Programs & Events

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“Open your arms to change, but don’t let go of your values.”

-Dalai Lama



## Community Chest → Southern Schuylkill United Fund → Schuylkill United Way

There have been numerous changes in Schuylkill United Way over the past 90 years, but the one constant has been our commitment to help our community through our outstanding Partner Agencies. Over the next few pages you will see highlights of some of our programs as well as brief explanations of how our Partner Agencies help the people of Schuylkill County.

Some of our Programs are a natural fit for SUW, while others took a few years to truly develop into the community-benefitting events that they are today.

Our Partner Agencies are local non-profit organizations that provide services to specific segments of our community. Some are micro-focused on an area or group of individuals within Schuylkill County, while others serve larger audiences across multiple counties and still others are part of a national organization. In all cases, our contact and partnership with them includes only the work they do and services they perform in Schuylkill County.

“The art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings.”  
— Kakuzo Okakura

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# Programs & Events

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## Captain Jason B. Jones Memorial Day of Caring: May 8th

SUW Day of Caring is a county-wide day of community service. Co-workers, friends, and families volunteer at one of our Partner Agencies or with another non-profit in Schuylkill County. The help these agencies receive might be painting, general clean up work, or some much needed maintenance.

We volunteer in honor of Captain Jason B. Jones who dedicated his life to his community and country.



## High School Football Challenge: June 16th



This event draws a crowd to enjoy a summer evening of community, youth, food trucks and more! It has been referred to as the unofficial kick-off to the high school football season. We urge you to mark it on your calendar and come see your community unite for a good cause. More event details can be found on the back cover of this newsletter.



## Stuff the Bus: July 31st & August 3rd

Think back to your school days and those warm summer days leading up to your first day of school. It was so exciting to go shopping for your new shoes, clothes, backpack, and all the supplies that went into that new backpack. Remember the excitement on the first morning of your new school year: wearing those shoes, clothes, and backpack? And finally, pulling out that brand new notebook that you couldn't wait to take notes in.

Now, imagine being a student whose family can't afford all those new things. Schuylkill United Way's Stuff the Bus program allows their Partner Agencies to distribute a backpack full of supplies to those students who need them. How? Businesses throughout the community become drop-off locations for donations of school supplies from customers, employees, or both. These items are sorted and "stuffed" into backpacks. The backpacks are then put into the hands of Schuylkill County students in need through our partner agencies and other organizations. Last year, 2000 backpacks were distributed.

If your organization would like to become a drop off location or donate supplies, contact Becky Woods at Schuylkill United Way.

## Golf Tournaments: June 26th & September 25th

Two golf tournaments are held annually where many people come from near and far to participate with friends while raising funds for Schuylkill United Way. These are held at Mountain Valley Golf Course in Brockton.

For more details, visit our website. For sponsorship opportunities contact Mike Joyce at Schuylkill United Way.



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# Programs & Events

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## Nurse's Pantry

Imagine letting a family know that their child has lice. Now imagine also telling them that not only do they have to treat that child's hair, but their entire family should be treated as well. At \$30 per lice kit, that could be crushing for many families.

SUW's Nurse's Pantry program started in 2020 to help the families in Schuylkill County with situations like this. And it doesn't just supply those lice kits. Nurse's Pantry also supplies school nurses with items like deodorant, toothpaste, body wash, and school approved clothing (including socks and underwear). These items allow students to stay focused, stay healthy, and stay in school.

SUW is proud to partner with school nurses to meet student needs. If you or your company would like to donate much needed supplies to this program, or to become a program sponsor, please contact Becky Woods.



## Schuylkill County HIVE: Community & Action

HIVE launched in 2024 as a joint effort by SUW, Schuylkill Community Action, Schuylkill Connects, and Tamaqua Area Community Partnership with the goal of uniting health & human service organizations for more collaborative work in Schuylkill County. Now in its third year, HIVE has hosted workshops and speakers to address housing, transportation, community resources, grant opportunities, and more. Contact Becky Woods for info on our June 8th event!



Thomas Pharmacy partners with SUW to purchase bulk items at cost for Nurse's Pantry.

## Help a Girl Out: Feminine Product & Diaper Drive

Did you know 1 in 7 women and girls age 12 to 44 in Pennsylvania, live below the poverty line? The cost of feminine hygiene products is often out of reach for many causing missed school and work. Thanks to our partner agency, Schuylkill Wellness Services, SUW was invited to help collect these items (and diapers and wipes), with Help A Girl Out USA.. The donations are then distributed in Schuylkill County through our partner agencies and school nurses with our Nurse's Pantry program. In 2026, 21 Schuylkill County businesses assisted in collecting 138,367 items – a 56% increase from last year!



SUW Partner Agencies & programs reached over 86,604 people in Schuylkill County in 2025.

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# Programs & Events

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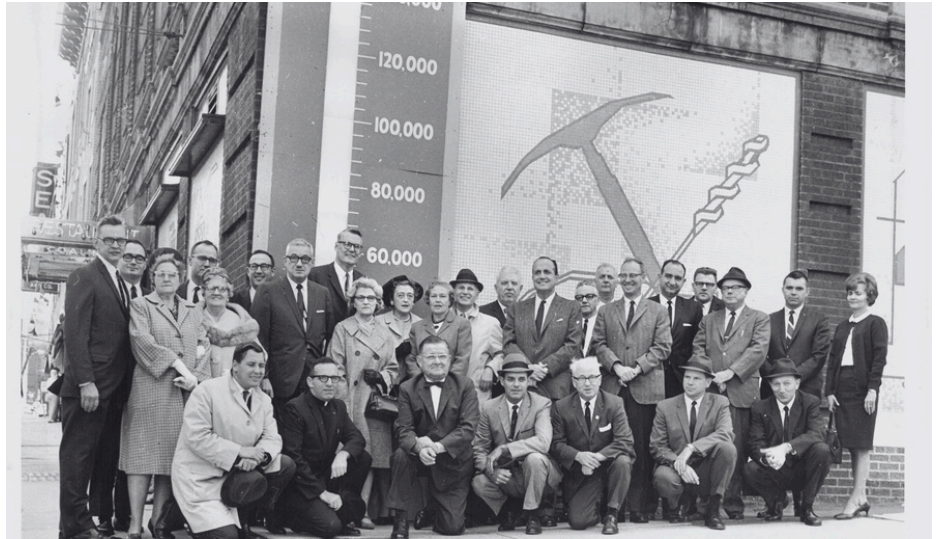
## 2027 Campaign Kickoff Breakfast: September 11th

Our 2027 Campaign will officially launch at the kickoff breakfast held on Friday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Every year, this breakfast is held in September to officially announce the campaign details. It builds excitement that feeds the critical energy that is required for the campaign to succeed.

Adding to that excitement is the unveiling of the prizes that will ultimately be won by several lucky donors. The prizes include a vacation package, snow blower, iPad, gas grill, multiple gift cards for groceries, and [*in the voice of Bob Barker*] A NEW CAR!

If you would like to be part of the excitement, keep an eye out for information in upcoming newsletters.



Community leaders gather in 1966 at the corner of Centre St. & Mahantongo St. in Pottsville, to unveil the 1967 annual campaign goal of \$167,000. Joseph H. Jones Sr. was campaign chairperson that year, and we made goal by \$2,225!

## Campaign Appreciation Breakfast: November 13th

This is our time to say “Thank You!” Regardless of the campaign outcome, it will be a success because of the impact the funds raised during campaign will have the following year. All of our Partner Agencies will benefit from allocations received from campaign donations and through those allocations be able to help their consumers and our Schuylkill County community. Of course, we always begin campaign with the expectation of achieving the goal set up by the Leadership Team. Appreciation Breakfast is when we announce the results of our efforts.



### Campaign Prizes

At Appreciation Breakfast we will name the winner of the Houser Award, given to the company that raises the most money for SUW during that campaign year. We award certificates to the top three companies in Employee Giving, with the awards tiered per company size. We also award certificates to the top five companies with the most Pacesetters.

### Individual Campaign Prizes

With the possible exception of revealing the campaign total, nothing matches the excitement of finding out who wins the car, and our other fine campaign prizes! Names are pulled live from an old-fashioned tumbler. We’ve never had the winner of the car being in attendance at the Breakfast, but you never know? Maybe this year...



Ask us how you can become a Pacesetter for only \$10 per week.

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# Partner Agencies

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## How We Work with Partner Agencies

SUW acts as a strategic hub for assisting our Partner Agencies with their missions. We don't just provide funding; we perform rigorous vetting to ensure our partner agencies are efficient, transparent, and results-oriented. By establishing a diversity of agencies, we prevent the duplication of services and ensure that our community's most vulnerable residents don't fall through the cracks.

## Why Your Support Matters

Fundraising is the engine that allows our partners to focus on their life-changing work. Your gift is a powerful investment in the entire county, providing a steady stream of support for 15 different agencies through one single donation. Since 98.5% of our funds stay local, your contribution directly stabilizes the programs that serve our neighbors in need in Schuylkill County.

## Original Partner Agencies

When Schuylkill United Way began [as Community Chest] in 1936, the original Partner Agencies were:

- American Red Cross
- Babies Milk Fund
- Benevolent Association
- Benevolent Association Home for Children
- Boy Scouts of America
- Good Samaritan Hospital
- Hebrew Welfare Fund
- The King's Daughters
- Lincoln House
- Pottsville Free Kindergarten
- Pottsville Hospital
- Pottsville Mission
- Salvation Army
- Schuylkill County Society for Crippled Children
- YMCA & YWCA

# Current Partner Agencies

(The year they became partner agencies is shown in parentheses)

## Schuylkill County Society for Pediatric Orthopedics (1936)

By addressing the unique medical needs of children with orthopedic conditions, this specialized agency steps in to ensure that the overwhelming costs of bone and joint issues don't stand in the way of a child's health. Through a combination of financial assistance and dedicated advocacy, the group provides local families with essential access to expert clinical care, corrective procedures, and the specialized equipment their children need to thrive.



## The Salvation Army, Pottsville Corps (1936)

When someone is struggling to keep the lights on or put food on the table, the Salvation Army steps in with emergency financial aid and a local food pantry. Their impact goes even deeper through community-focused programs like the Food for the Body & Soul Café, which provides a free lunch every Friday, and the Empower Youth initiative, offering local kids a safe space for mentorship and after-school activities.



## Schuylkill YMCA (1936)

Most people know the "Y" for the gym or the pool, but they're really the heart of the community, offering a safe spot for childcare, youth sports, and staying active at any age.

*Partner Agencies: continued on next page*

Over 65% of the funds we raise each year comes from individuals, not businesses or corporations

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# Partner Agencies

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*Partner Agencies: continued*



## Scouting America (1936)

It's more than just camping. They use the outdoors to teach kids leadership, teamwork, and how to be helpful members of the community.



**You just never know  
when you're going  
to need  
The Good Neighbor.**



## American Red Cross (1936)

The local chapter of the Red Cross remains a primary responder to domestic disasters, such as residential fires. Beyond emergency relief, the agency manages local blood drives and provides certified training in CPR and first aid to enhance community preparedness.



## Avenues, founded as UCP (1959)

They do amazing work helping people with developmental disabilities live more independently. Whether it's finding a job or a place to live, they focus on making sure everyone is included.

## Tamaqua Area Meals on Wheels (1976)

It's more than just a hot meal delivered to the door. For many homebound seniors, the volunteer who drops off the food is the only person they see all day - it's a friendly face and a safety check all in one.



## Big Impact Group (1984)

Formerly known as Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Big Impact Group creates a "big sibling" connection by pairing local youth with dedicated mentors. These professionally supported, one-to-one relationships help kids build confidence and find their path, fostering personal development and long-term success for the county's younger generation.

## Schuylkill Hope Center for Victims of Domestic Violence (1987)

For anyone facing domestic violence, this is a safe harbor. They offer a 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, and legal help to help survivors get back on their feet.



*Partner Agencies: continued on next page*

The strength of the team is each individual member.  
The strength of each member is the team. —Phil Jackson

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# Partner Agencies

March 2026

*Partner Agencies: continued*

## Child Development, Inc. (1998)

These experts prepare little ones for school through preschool programs and developmental checks. By ensuring every child starts kindergarten on level ground regardless of family budget, they set the foundation for lifelong learning.



## Schuylkill Wellness Services (1999)

Schuylkill Wellness Services provides essential resources for HIV/AIDS and STI prevention. Their work focuses on confidential testing, case management, and community education aimed at reducing health disparities. By offering these vital services in a supportive environment, they help residents stay safe and informed without the stigma.



## SARCC: Sexual Assault & Counseling Resource Center of Schuylkill County (2010)

Dedicated to supporting survivors of sexual assault, SARCC provides confidential counseling and proactive prevention programs for all ages. By promoting healthy dating skills and safe environments, they empower the community to stand up against abuse through education. Whether for a school, workplace, or church, requesting a tailored training session is an impactful first step toward a safer community.



## Nurse-Family Partnership (2016)

Nurse-Family Partnership of Schuylkill County is a lifesaver for first-time, low-income mothers, pairing them with registered nurses for regular home visits. From pregnancy until the child's second birthday, these nurses provide vital education on maternal health and child development.

## Northeast PA Manufacturers & Employers Council: Y.E.S. Northeast Certificate Program (2019)

This council bridges the gap between education and industry through the Your Employability Skills (Y.E.S.) program. By teaching high school students essential workplace habits and soft skills, they prepare the local workforce for immediate entry into the regional economy.



## Tamaqua Area Adult Day Care Center (2020)

This skilled center provides seniors with a medically supervised, social environment during the day. It offers essential support for family caregivers who need to work or recharge, knowing their loved ones are safe and engaged.



"I always wondered why somebody didn't do something about that. Then I realized I was somebody." -Lily Tomlin

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# Pacesetters Club

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# The Heart of the Campaign

For over 30 years, the Schuylkill United Way Pacesetters Club has been the driving force behind community support in Schuylkill County. Pacesetters are the ultimate campaign game-changers because they create immediate momentum. This early success proves our goals are reachable and inspires the rest of the community to join in.

## A Legacy of Leadership

The Founders: The club was launched under the visionary leadership of co-chairs Joe Schlitzer, a prominent business leader, and Jay Jones, a respected attorney. Together with 1994 Campaign Chairman Wayne Lammie, they sought to inspire a higher level of individual giving.

In its inaugural year, the club started with 100 members who contributed a combined total of \$58,500. In the 2026 Campaign, 796 Pacesetters contributed a total of \$667,806; more than half of the campaign total. Leadership remains a central theme of the club, with dedicated volunteers like current Pacesetter Club Chair Patrick Kane continuing the legacy of the founders.



## Pacesetters Reception

The Pacesetters' Reception is an annual event held to honor and celebrate the leading businesses and individuals - known as "Pacesetters" - who jumpstart the annual fundraising campaign by pledging \$500 or more.

This gathering serves as a Thank You to recognize those who have made significant financial commitments early in the campaign.

## Why Being a Pacesetter Matters

Pacesetters are the "lead runners" who set the tempo for the Schuylkill United Way's annual mission. This group includes local companies - such as Hydro, Wegmans, and Bob Weaver Auto - that jump-start the campaign by hosting employee giving drives in the summer, as well as individuals who contribute \$500 or more annually (about \$10 a week). By stepping up early, these leaders create the vital energy needed to prove our goals are reachable and inspire the rest of the community to join in. Thanks to our partnership with the John E. Morgan Foundation, new or increased Pacesetter gifts are often matched, doubling your impact on our 15 partner agencies before the general campaign even begins.

## For individuals, the Pacesetters Club includes anyone who contributes \$500 or more annually (about \$10 a week).



## The Role of the Pacesetter Chair

The Pacesetter Chair acts as the chief ambassador for our early fundraising efforts, leading the charge to build traction before the general campaign even begins. Currently led by Patrick Kane, alongside newly appointed Co-Chair, Michelle Hammer, the role is all about stewardship and inspiration. The Chairs work closely with local business leaders and individual donors to secure "leadership-level" gifts, ensuring that when we hit our fall kickoff, we already have a significant head start. By highlighting the impact of these early donations, the Chairs help provide the critical financial stability our 15 partner agencies count on to serve Schuylkill County.



"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." — Mother Teresa

June 16, 2026

# High School Football Challenge

Ghosh Orthodontics Field at Spartan Stadium

Free Admission

## Local Youth Showcase their Skills in a Family Friendly Event

The High School Football Challenge is a combine event showcasing the skills and abilities of our local high school football players. This free event is open to the public from 5pm to 8pm, creating a summer evening that your entire family can enjoy.

The event consists of seven stations plus a halftime kick out. Don't worry about cooking because there will be a variety of food trucks that are sure to please everyone's tastebuds.

The Partner Agencies of Schuylkill United Way will also be in attendance to showcase how they help the people of Schuylkill County who are in need.

Be sure to mark your calendar for this fun event!



Our Schuylkill News of H.O.P.E. newsletter is proudly sponsored by Lehigh Valley Hospital - Schuylkill 12

