

County plans for distribution of opioid funds

By Jim Thaxton

FALMOUTH — It is 2022. You are a county judge executive in one of Kentucky's 120 counties. You open your email and discover your county received a substantial amount of money from the state's opioid settlement fund and will continue to receive additional funds for the next 16 years based upon a complicated formula.

It is a lot of money, and there's likely more to come. Just last month, Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman announced, "Today, with \$110 million invested in recovery efforts in Kentucky, Kroger has agreed to be part of the solution."

If you're like Pendleton County Judge Executive David Fields, you know

individuals from Pendleton County who suffered from opioid addiction, you know people who died from an overdose of opioids, you know their families and loved ones.

You remember how things were before the pill mills, before heroin, before fentanyl destroyed lives.

You look at the spread sheet for Pendleton County and see the estimated amount is more than \$656,000 over 16 years, and you realize this is sacred money.

It will never bring back those that died. It won't buy back the suffering. But if used wisely, it could honor the dead, help those living with substance use disorder, those in recovery, and give hope to the families who suffered with

them. Fields and the magistrates of Pendleton County Fiscal Court realized they did not have the expertise to make the best use of the Opioid Settlement Funds, but there was an organization in the county dedicated to the prevention of drug use. In January 2023, Fields met with Stephanie Green, executive director of Pendleton County Champions — under the umbrella of Champions for a Drug Free Kentucky initiative.

Members of the Fiscal Court and Champions pulled together representatives from law enforcement, Harrison Memorial and St. Elizabeth hospitals, North Key, Northern Kentucky Area Development District, Pendleton Schools, Three Rivers District Health De-

partment and others to form a coalition dedicated to determining the most effective use of the money.

In February of 2024 the Coalition formed a community advisory board under the umbrella of Champion's new nonprofit 501(C)3. Members are:

- David Fields, chairman, Pendleton County judge executive;
- Jessica Green, vice chair, community outreach coordinator with Journey Recovery;
- Kenna Knight, treasurer, Pendleton County Extension Office Family and Consumer Science Agent;
- Natasha Trauth, secretary, community health strategist with Three Rivers District Health Department;
- Sgt. Brody Schmeing, Falmouth Police De-

partment;

- Tiffany Maegley, health education coordinator/risk reduction specialist with the University of Kentucky;
- Bridget Browning, district counselor with Pendleton County Schools

- Stacey Sanning, Pendleton County Fiscal Court attorney;
- Linde Eaton, community outreach nurse with Three Rivers;
- Gerald Long, community liaison with Addiction Recovery Care.

The members of the Advisory Board will create a Request for Proposal using the guidelines set by the Kentucky Association of Counties.

Proposals can request up to \$35,000 each year. The advisory board will aid applicants that fall within the guidelines to develop a

grant at no charge through Epiphany Community Services.

Fields said, "To my knowledge, what Champions, the court and the coalition developed is unique to Kentucky."

Stephanie Green agreed. "You don't have to be a professional grant writer to apply. Epiphany will help put a professional proposal together."

Anyone with an idea about how to increase access to community treatment, employ prevention strategies, improve enforcement, introduce harm reduction programs provide access to medicated-assisted treatment, or related concepts is encouraged to apply, she said.

For more information, email pcchampionsco@gmail.com or visit pcchampions.com



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This is a free program designed to assist individuals in their journey to recovery.

The Thrive Initiative uses SMART, an evidence-based self-help process that assists people to make positive changes in their lives. SMART stands for Self-Management and Recovery Training.

The SMART approach to sustained recovery is secular and research-based while allowing for participants to continue to engage in other recovery programs, Henderson said.

Visit www.smartrecovery.org or contact Henderson at 859-654-6985 for information about The Thrive Initiative, she said.

OTHER BUSINESS

Also during the caucus meeting, council:

- Received a copy of the financial audit. Paul Maddox from Maddox & Associates, CPA reviewed the audit with Council noting no problems and complimented the city for their financial records.

- Tami Vater, director Pendleton County Economic and Tourism Development shared progress on Forks on the Licking BBQ event scheduled for June 7

at the Pendleton County Fairgrounds.

The event's Facebook page has already generated over 400 followers in less than a week. Vater told Council that the new festival event caught the attention of a local celebrity Stacey Jett, who has appeared on Food Network, Travel Channel and Netflix World Food Championships.

Because of the nature of the festival, Vater requested support from the council to allow beer to be sold. The police chief shared his research for a temporary license and assured council that there would be a police presence there during the entire event.

- Fire Chief John Lucas and Mayor Luke Price said they have identified a ladder truck in Alexandria that both men believe would be advantageous in fighting fires within the city.

Lucas said the cost of the truck was within the current budget. Also built into the budget were funds to pay volunteers for training at the station and within the city.

Council will address the truck and stipends for volunteers at the next meeting.

- Hart told council that one more hire was all that was necessary for the police department to provide 24/7 officer protection in the city.

Hart also shared several anecdotes about the successful use of the K-9 unit in the city, county and neighboring counties leading to drug arrests.

- Price addressed the need to improve insurance benefits for city employees. He praised the tireless work done to keep the city's streets open during the snowstorm. There were six water main breaks during the freeze, and all were promptly repaired.

Price told Council about a surprise visit by the Kentucky Division of Water to the water treatment facility. According to the mayor, the inspection went very well and "everything is good."

Council was also informed that electrical lines from the substation to the water treatment facility are being upgraded as a preemptive measure to keep the facility running.

- Brian Thompson Zoning Administrator and City Attorney Brandon Voelker discussed ways to clean up the wording in the city ordinance to best allow code enforcement to address some of the issues regarding storage sheds, RVs and nonoperative vehicles. Price requested that Thompson and Voelker to put together the necessary changes for Council's next meeting.

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Together, We Can Build a Healthier Future for Our Youth



THREE RIVERS DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Three Rivers District Health Department is implementing Planet Youth to help address youth substance use and create an environment where children and teens can thrive. Using proven, evidence-based strategies, we're working together to build healthier, happier communities.

Community involvement is critical to our success. We need community members like you to join us in creating meaningful change for our youth. Want to make a difference? Learn how you can get involved and support this vital initiative. Contact Natasha Trauth at Natasha.Trauth@ky.gov

