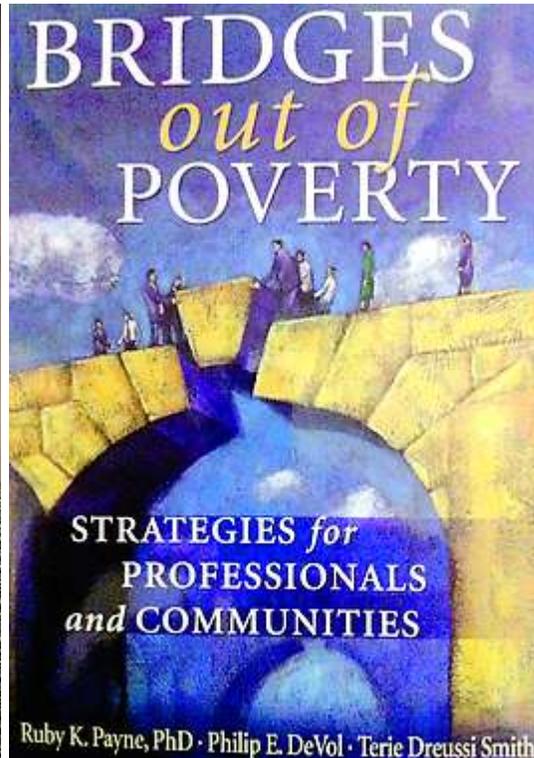


Poverty is spotlight at forum for leaders

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December 21, 2012



MARTINSVILLE

Wednesday's community forum on poverty in Morgan County exceeded Dan Moore's expectations.

"People seemed engaged, the conversations were lively," he said. "I've been to things like this before where people just stare at each other."

Moore is president and CEO of Home Bank. The bank paid for the forum and author Phil DeVol to come and talk about the concepts in his books, specifically, "Bridges Out of Poverty."

The day began with DeVol speaking to leaders from Morgan County in the sanctuary at First United Methodist Church, 3150 E. Myra Lane, Martinsville, about tools for tackling poverty that have been used in communities around the United States and overseas. After lunch, the group met for roundtable discussions and talked about ways to implement the concepts discussed earlier in the day.

There will be another forum Jan. 31 in which Terie Dreussi Smith, another author of the book, will take a more in-depth look at the concepts and hopefully bring someone from South Bend to talk about how the concepts were implemented there. Moore hopes to fill the 350-seat sanctuary for that forum.

“I hope the enthusiasm from today resonates with people,” he said. “I hope to build a groundswell. This is our time.”

DeVol told the group the concepts in his book stemmed from a realization he had while working to help people suffering from addiction: Most programs were designed from a middle-class mindset while most of his patients came from poverty. Once he started talking to people living in poverty, he began to understand their situations better and how to help them.

One concept, he explained to the group, is how the poor, the middle class and the wealthy live. He said that the poor must live in the moment. They are constantly trying to find ways to get through each day and have little to no time for abstract thought. The middle class on the other hand have today covered. They have time to plan ahead and think about the future and are therefore better prepared. The wealthy have even more resources and therefore even more time for abstract thought and planning.

DeVol gave the example of scams that prey on the poor by providing what appears to be a concrete solution to an immediate need. He used the example of a meat man who goes door to door selling vacuum packed chicken, pork and other meat. The meat man tells poor families who don't have the money they can have the meat today and pay him later, as long as they sign a contract. The contract requires them to continue buying meat at more than twice the price it would be at a grocery store.

“If you keep solving problems in the immediate, the same thing is going to happen,” DeVol said.

Another concept was understanding the challenges of poverty. DeVol used an example of a court that required people to make probation appointments at a certain time on a certain day. He said people in poverty often want to be on time for those appointments, but things like unreliable transportation make that difficult. The court changed the appointments from a certain day and time to anytime before a certain day. The result was fewer bench warrants being issued.

“If you become flexible you can get results,” DeVol said.

At the end of the day DeVol said he thought good things would come from the forum and wanted to track what happens in Morgan County.

Jerry Sanders, assistant superintendent with the MSD of Martinsville, thought the ideas put forth during the forum would help make a difference.

“I believe there are a lot of different pockets of efforts reaching out,” he said. “We need to coordinate those efforts and I believe today's concepts are a huge part of that.”

Martinsville *Reporter-Times*

<http://www.reporter-times.com/stories/2012/12/21/news.qp-2001584.sto>

Those interested in attending the next forum are asked to email larnold@homebanksb.com.

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