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Youth conference to feature drug czar

By JANE THOMPSON-SMITH
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The Upper Bucks and Lehigh Valley areas are gearing up for justCommunity's fourth annual conference — Unleashing the Power of Youth and Community Potential — that will be held Oct. 12, 13 and 14 at the Holiday Inn in Allentown.

The positive youth development conference, meant to celebrate "what matters to youth, rather than what is the matter with youth," will be expanded to three days this year, allowing for more workshops for young people and adults interested in community building.

As in years past, youth have also been heavily involved in planning the conference this year, and will serve as co-presenters at workshops.

Some of the workshops geared specifically for youth will include How Do You Know if You are in

Love?, Assets 101: An Introduction to the 40 Developmental Assets, Leadership: The Reward is the Journey, The Game of Life: Rules of Engagement, Media, Manipulation and Me, and much more.

JustCommunity's Lee Rush said another reason the conference has been extended is because a lot of people are attending from out of state, and will arrive in the area on Sunday, Oct. 12, anyway.

Also, some people can't get off work or school, and will at least be able to attend the conference on Sunday.

In addition to being expanded, this year's conference, that is expected to be attended by about 350 people from 17 or 18 states, will include an appearance by Deputy Drug Czar Mary Ann Solberg of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy on Oct. 14.

Solberg, who was a community

coalition leader in Troy, Mich., oversees a new federal program in Washington — Drug Free Communities, which is meant to help stem the tide of drug abuse in this country.

The conference includes daily keynote speakers, workshops and "institutes" on a variety of topics.

According to Rush, Peter DeBenedittis, media literacy expert from Albuquerque, N.M., will give a "powerful" keynote address — Media, Manipulation and Me, on Oct. 13.

In addition, keynote speaker Marilyn Peplau, a Search Institute trainer from Minneapolis, Minn., will present Change of Heart: Creating a More Caring School Climate Oct. 14.

In a workshop Oct. 13, Kathleen Kimball-Baker, also from the Search Institute, will present, Tag— You're It: 50 Easy Ways to Connect

with Young People. And on Oct. 12, John Venner, president of Pennridge Community Communications Inc. in Perkasié, who has been involved with the Palisades Academy at Palisades High School, will lead Building Community through Video Productions with Youth. Also on Oct. 12, America's Promise board of director member Dan Horgan, 21, coordinator of Allegheny County's Promise in Pittsburgh, will present, The Game of Life: Rules of Engagement.

Rush, who has been planning the conference all year, said despite recent funding cuts hitting the education and social service sector, he expects it to be every bit as successful as last year, with comparable attendance.

For more information, call 215-538-4796 or access the Web site www.justcommunity.com.