

DeWine marks METRICH's 25th

Attorney general speaks at task force luncheon

Attorney General Mike DeWine can appreciate the idea behind the METRICH Enforcement Unit.

"The most important thing is to share information," he said. "We've come a long, long way in the years since I was a county prosecuting attorney."



Mansfield Police Chief Dino Sgambellone listens as Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine speaks at METRICH's 25th anniversary luncheon

DeWine was the guest speaker at Wednesday's luncheon at the Holiday Inn to celebrate the 10-county drug task force's 25th anniversary. Former police Chief Phil Messer founded METRICH in 1986, along with attorneys John Allen and Jerry Ault, who then worked at the Richland County Prosecutor's Office.

The idea behind METRICH was to have agencies share information and avoid working on similar cases separately. METRICH has grown into the largest multi-jurisdictional task force in Ohio. In addition to Richland County, other participants include Crawford, Ashland, Knox, Hancock, Huron, Marion, Morrow, Seneca and Wyandot counties.

"I think our greatest success is being recognized by the citizens we serve as a professional task force that partners with the community to address drug traffickers and criminal groups," city police Chief and former METRICH commander Dino Sgambellone said.

METRICH is facing some of the same issues it did 25 years ago, Sgambellone said, then gave some figures. For the third year in a row, heroin has topped cocaine in calls.

That took DeWine back a few years.

"Some things never change," he said. "(When I was a county prosecutor) the heroin problem was confined to the major cities in the state. It is the evil twin to the prescription drug problem."

DeWine said four Ohioans accidentally overdose each day. He told law enforcement officers his office would help however it could.

"We look at our job as working with you and serving you. You are our customers," DeWine said. "We don't want to take the case from you; we just want to provide assistance."

DeWine said one of his targets is consumer fraud. He said 32,000 complaints filed with the attorney general's office last year produced only two indictments.

DeWine also talked about scams. In the grandparent scam, someone pretending to be a person's grandchild claims to be in trouble and in

need of money. The attorney general said the average victim of the scam transfers \$6,800.

"When that money goes out, it is gone," he said. "Those cases are very hard to prosecute. They're often overseas."

But DeWine's top priority, he said, is to reduce the wait time with the Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, which processes evidence for many agencies.

DeWine said he has transferred money to BCI to bring in an additional 18 scientists.

"It is imperative that we get this done," he said.

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