

News Editor:
Emmitt B. Feldner
893-6411 ext. 112

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Marriage campaign promoted

by Sue Mroz
of The Review staff

The great Roman philosopher Cicero once said, "The first bond of society is marriage."

And Charlene Lammers, executive director of the non-profit organization, Great Marriages for Sheboygan County, wholeheartedly agrees.

"While a great amount of time is spent on planning the wedding, for many couples, very little time is spent on preparing for the marriage, as evidenced by the divorce rate in this country being around 50 percent," she said, then added, "But the good news is that 70 percent of these can be prevented."

Regarding the other 30 percent, "Those can be related to addiction, adultery or abuse, and in those circumstances, it can be very difficult to save the marriage," she admitted. "And for the safety of those involved, the couple should not be together."

The non-profit Great Marriages for Sheboygan County is presenting educational programs to teach couples how to prevent ending up in divorce court.

Initiated last year, Great Mar-

riages for Sheboygan County is located at 607 S. 8th St., Sheboygan, and has a seven-member board of directors. It is dedicated to enriching marriages here in Sheboygan County.

A paragraph on the organization's Web site notes:

"We believe Sheboygan County's future depends upon the strength and success of our community's families. We consider marriage our most valuable resource, vital to the health of our society and its citizens. And we want to give people the hope and skills necessary to achieve a happy, lifelong marriage."

Lammers outlined the organization's six goals:

- To reduce the divorce rate.
- To increase the marriage rate, while discouraging cohabitation before marriage.
- To decrease out-of-wedlock births.
- To increase marital satisfaction and health.
- To renew the hope for happy life-long marriages.
- To strengthen families and preserve the future generation.

Great Marriages for Sheboygan County offers researched and

proven educational programs for all stages and walks of life including: pre-marital education, marriage enrichment, healthy relationship and dating skills, programs for stress-filled marriages; a marriage resource center and a "Support Marriage" media campaign.

The organization has a group of volunteers who organize monthly marriage programs and seminars at either The Gateway II Center in Plymouth or at St. Nicholas Hospital in Sheboygan or at local churches. One of these was titled "How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk/Jerkette."

A 10-week class previously held was titled "Ten Great Dates." Couples who participated in this program learned how to increase their communication skills and conflict-resolution [fighting fairly] skills," Lammers said.

"This is class is a series of 10 structured dates that couples go on."

The program was very successful. "People said they talked more on dates there than they did during the past 10 years," she said.

According to Lammers, community marriage initiatives have



GREAT MARRIAGES FOR SHEBOYGAN COUNTY Executive Director Charlene Lammers is shown at a recent "Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage" seminar at the Gateway II Center in Plymouth. Over 220 people attended the two-day event. — Submitted photo

been forming across the nation throughout the past decade. "Statistics show that the emphasis on pre-marital education and marriage enrichment works," she said. These initiatives are needed.

Married couples:

- Are physically healthier. They live longer and are happier than singles or divorced individuals.
- Are more satisfied with their lives and wealthier than others.
- Report more marital enjoyment and a better sex life than singles.

• Have better mental health. Also, statistics from the Foundation for a Great Marriage organization, headquartered in Green Bay, reveal that children whose parents remain married do better academically and emotionally. And, children of married parents are healthier and are less likely to live in poverty, and they attend church on a regular basis.

Children reared in families of broken marriages have more than twice the risk of social and behav-

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Marriage campaign seeks to reduce divorce rate

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ioral problems than children reared in married-parent families, Lammers said.

Children from broken families have higher rates of delinquency and are more likely to experiment with drugs, alcohol and sex. Also, children in broken families are more likely to be victims of abuse and molestation.

Fifty-four percent of divorces in Wisconsin during 2004 involved children under 18.

A Centers for Disease Control study conducted in 2002 points out that 67 percent of live-ins never get married. Those who do have an almost 50 percent higher rate of divorce than married couples who do not live together first.

Also, a child whose mother lives with a man who is not his or her father is 33 times more likely to suffer serious physical child abuse.

Lammers stressed too that divorce and unwed childbearing create higher costs, due to higher rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, child abuse, domestic violence and poverty.

According to the "Longitudinal Survey of Youth" (1979-2000), overall, 77 percent of all children suffering from long-term poverty are from broken families or unwed parents.

But there is hope. A healthy marriage is based on a firm commitment and on a set of relational skills that can be taught. There are many valuable teaching tools

available, and Great Marriages for Sheboygan County is using those at this time in helping couples to strengthen their marriages.

Mary Kunda of Glenbeulah participated in one of the programs and was most impressed.

"After attending an event, I couldn't wait to go home to call my 'couple' friends to tell them how much fun and how effective the evening was," she said.

"Not only did we laugh together constantly, but we learned effective solutions that we can use daily in our marriages. It was so entertaining and beneficial, that my husband talked about it for days!" Kunda noted. "He was so excited about it, that he signed us up for another program."

Great Marriages for Sheboygan County recently spearheaded an initiative that led to an impressive Valentine's Day event at Mead Library in Sheboygan.

On that day, 49 clergy members from 17 denominations throughout Sheboygan County signed the Sheboygan County Marriage Covenant, outlining five areas that the clergy members agree upon to encourage couples they marry in their churches to fulfill.

Note: To make a contribution to Great Marriages for Sheboygan County, make a check payable to Great Marriages for Sheboygan County, and mail it to: Great Marriages for Sheboygan County, 607 S. 8th St., Sheboygan, WI 53081.

Sunny Ridge sale planned