

MARILEE CHINNICI-ZUERCHER

WELCOME TO FIRSTLINK. WE ARE THRILLED THAT SO MANY DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS THROUGHOUT CENTRAL OHIO ARE REPRESENTED HERE TODAY. OUR SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

- COMMISSIONER BROOKS AND STOKES, FROM THE FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
- JANET JACKSON, UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL OHIO
- BO CHILTON, REPRESENTING COUNCILWOMAN CHARLETA TAVARES, AND
- TOM THON FROM CLEAR CHANNEL

THERE ARE STILL OTHERS WHO HAVE BEEN STRONG SUPPORTERS OF FIRSTLINK AND THE 2-1-1 SERVICE. MANY THANKS TO THESE FRIENDS INCLUDING:

- SALLY TESTA, FROM REPRESENTATIVE TIBERI'S OFFICE
- KRISTIN BAUGHMAN, FROM CONGRESSWOMAN DEBRA PRYCE'S OFFICE

**WE COME TOGETHER TODAY AT FIRSTLINK – WITH OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS – TO ANNOUNCE A MAJOR EXPANSION OF CENTRAL OHIO'S 2-1-1 SERVICE.**

AS MANY OF YOU ALREADY KNOW, 2-1-1 WAS IMPLEMENTED IN THE FALL OF 2003 AS A SINGLE, SIMPLE PHONE NUMBER THAT FRANKLIN

COUNTY RESIDENTS CAN CALL TO GET INFORMATION ON ANY NUMBER OF SOCIAL SERVICES, GOVERNMENTAL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES.

WHILE THE PEOPLE IN GREATER COLUMBUS ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE A LARGE NUMBER OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE, NAVIGATING THIS SYSTEM CAN BE A FRUSTRATING TASK. PEOPLE ARE OFTEN NOT AWARE OF THE SERVICES OR HOW TO REACH THEM. AS A RESULT, THEY MAY NOT SEEK ASSISTANCE WHEN NEEDED, OFTEN ESCALATING THE PROBLEM. OR, THEY MAY TRY CALLING NUMEROUS AGENCIES OR 9-1-1, INCREASING THEIR OWN FRUSTRATION AND TAKING TIME AWAY FROM TRUE EMERGENCIES.

LAST YEAR WE RECEIVED MORE THAN 165,000 CALLS TO THIS SERVICE. CALLERS WHO NEEDED ASSISTANCE WITH EMERGENCY HOUSING, HEATING OR FOOD. RESIDENTS WHO WERE STRUGGLING WITH RAISING A DIFFICULT CHILD OR CARING FOR AN ELDERLY PARENT ARE JUST A FEW OF TYPES OF CALLS WE RECEIVE IN A DAY.

BUT WE KNEW WE WEREN'T REACHING EVERYONE WITH OUR MESSAGE. 2-1-1 WAS ONLY ACCESSIBLE THROUGH LAND LINES, AND SO WE WERE LOSING ACCESS TO A GREAT NUMBER OF OUR CLIENTS.

IT IS NO SECRET THAT THE NUMBER OF WIRELESS PHONES WILL SOON SURPASS LAND LINES, AND THAT IN MANY INSTANCES IT IS THE PRIMARY PHONE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL. AND SO WE SET OUT TO CONNECT EVERYONE – BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WE DO AT FIRSTLINK

– HELP PEOPLE CONNECT.

OUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION FOR 2006 WAS TO DO WHATEVER WAS NECESSARY TO CREATE ACCESS TO 2-1-1 FOR CELLULAR PHONE USERS. WE ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR WIRELESS PARTNERS WHO TOOK ON THIS CHALLENGE AND GRANTED 2-1-1 ACCESS FOR THEIR CUSTOMERS. PROGRAMMING HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND THE SERVICE IS NOW LIVE FOR CUSTOMERS OF:

- ALLTEL
- CELLULAR ONE
- CINGULAR (AT&T WIRELESS)
- NEXTEL
- SPRINT
- T-MOBILE, AND
- VERIZON

FIRSTLINK ALSO IS WORKING WITH TIME WARNER TO PROVIDE THEIR DIGITAL PHONE CUSTOMERS WITH ACCESS TO 2-1-1 AND WE EXPECT TO HAVE THIS FREE SERVICE IMPLEMENTED BY LATE SPRING.

WITH ACCESS CREATED FOR CELLULAR PHONES, WE EXPECT CALLS TO INCREASE BY AS MUCH AS 30 PERCENT.

ALTHOUGH ACCESS HAS BEEN GRANTED TO CELLULAR CALLERS IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, OUR JOB IS NOT DONE. OUR SIGHTS ARE SET ON

BUSINESSES IN CENTRAL OHIO WITH CENTRAL SWITCHBOARDS.

MANY COMPANIES BLOCK 4-1-1 SO THEY DO NOT GET CHARGED FOR UNNECESSARY CALLS. WHEN BLOCKING 4-1-1, THEY TYPICALLY BLOCK ALL N-1-1 NUMBERS EXCEPT 9-1-1. IT IS A VERY SIMPLE PROGRAMMING TASK FOR COMPANIES TO ADDRESS, WHICH WOULD ALLOW THEIR EMPLOYEES ACCESS TO 2-1-1, AND ULTIMATELY, TO THE HELP THEY NEED.

IN A CONTINUED EFFORT TO HELP PEOPLE CONNECT, WE ARE ASKING FOR YOUR HELP IN ENSURING THAT EACH OF YOUR ORGANIZATIONS ARE 2-1-1 ACCESSIBLE. PLEASE HAVE YOUR TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR CALL OUR OFFICES FOR MORE INFORMATION AND WE CAN ASSIST THEM – AND ULTIMATELY, MAKE 2-1-1 TRULY UNIVERSAL IN CENTRAL OHIO.

AT THIS TIME, I WOULD LIKE TO INTRODUCE JANET JACKSON, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL OHIO TO TELL US ABOUT THE 2-1-1 NATIONAL EFFORT.