

**James B. McCarthy, Summit County Executive**  
Victim Assistance Program Annual Luncheon  
April 27, 2001

GOOD AFTERNOON:

It is indeed an honor to be asked to address this gathering today. This really is a celebration. It is a celebration of the resiliency of the human spirit. It is a celebration of triumph over tragedy. It is a celebration of the power of the simplest good deed or kind gesture—helping your neighbor. All too often we hear of the criminal element, the darker side of our society. Today, we celebrate the people who bring rays of hope to others so desperately needing it.

Today, we celebrate the victim assistance program. Dr. Bob Denton, his staff and volunteers work wonders every year helping victims and their loved ones put back the pieces after their lives have been shattered by senseless violence or unthinkable circumstance. Every day, victim assistance looks for other ways, other methods to ease the pain, whether it's manning soup kitchens, administering halfway houses, gathering clothes for the needy or just by taking the time to sit and listen to another person. So let me take this opportunity, on behalf of the summit county community and its government—to thank you for your compassion, for your time, for your goodwill, for your commitment. You are the hidden heroes. You are the ones who come to the crime scene, to the hospital, to the home? Always at the ready to respond to a cry for help.

It is appropriate that this recognition luncheon is held during national victims rights week. Looking around at the individuals here today to receive awards for your service, your number is relatively small in comparison to the people that you have helped. In the last year alone, you have reached out to a total of 20,744 people. That represents almost five percent of our population in summit county. And I do not want to toss away that number as just a statistic. These are individuals. That number represents 20,744 different stories, 20,744 different reactions to what occurred in their lives,

20,744 people who reached out for help—and found you. And that is just in this past year alone. Start to count from one and keep counting. It will take you quite awhile to reach 20,744. But somehow, those of you in this room did just that—reached 20,744 people. The dedication you have displayed to uphold victims rights is commendable. Considering that 80 percent of the people impacted by crime do not seek out this organization, it is impressive that the victim assistance program has set up such an efficient network to identify and contact those who need your help.

Quite frankly, that is one of the goals that I brought to my administration when I became county executive earlier this year. I feel it is essential that this government develop partnerships in the public and private sectors in order for this government to serve as effectively as it can. Whether it is with the business community, faith-based organizations, social service entities or civic and educational groups, i want them to know that summit county government is their partner. With the scope of programs and services this government offers it only makes sense to offers these assets through partnerships. Anyone devoted to improving the quality of life for the citizens of this community, i seek and welcome their input and their involvement.

I think it is quite apparent that victim assistance has already gotten to that point. If it were not for the extensive networking and cooperation this organization has forged with law enforcement and social service groups, you could not do the good work you do as proficiently. This organization realized a long time ago that you can't do it alone. You learned a long time ago that you have to reach out beyond the scope of your organization to ask for advice and assistance on how you can do it better. You have reached out to other organizations to help you get the word out that the victim assistance program is at the disposal of the citizens of this community. You have reached out to summit county government, and I hope you believe that we have responded to your satisfaction.

Summit County Government allocates 75 thousand dollars to your organization and I believe it is money well spent. I hope you know that this government has done more than written a check. We have listened. We have listened to your requests to the judicial and law enforcement arms of this government about the need for family impact statements in our common pleas and juvenile courts. It was your contention that victims rights would be served to a greater degree if the courts could hear from family members who have been visited by tragic events.

For so many years it seemed that the constitutional rights of the defendants were almost a pre-occupation. It certainly was a telling and well-worn ploy of defense lawyers. I will not stand before you and assert that defendants rights should be ignored. But left in the wake of those arguments, at times was the rights of the victims and voices of their family members. I believe we have taken steps to rectify that situation in our courts. I believe we have listened, identified a need and showed the proper concern for the victims and their families. This is another outgrowth of partnering: Achieving positive results from well-considered initiatives.

Of course, I would be remiss if i didn't acknowledge the ultimate partnering venture concerning this organization. I am talking, of course, about "NOVA"—the National Organization of Victim Assistance. The founding president of this incredible organization is some guy named "Denton". Reverend Denton recognized the value of networking before it became a buzz word. Reverend Denton brought his concept of victim assistance that he introduced to our community and shared it with the rest of the nation—to the benefit of countless thousands over the years.

Right now, nova consists of over 45-hundred agencies nationwide with over 11-thousand victim service and policy professionals. It goes without saying that summit county is very fortunate to have the victim assistance program as a part of our community for the past 25 years. The nation is fortunate that this organization was formed 25 years ago.It is the model by which other organizations of its kind are organized...and it is still a work in progress.

There are new methods of outreach, new battles to fight for victims rights, more venues to seek advocates for the work this great organization does. The lion's share of the time, those of you who offer your time and your talent do it without fanfare. But none of you got into this for acclaim. You became involved because you care.

Today we acknowledge your selfless contribution to your fellow citizens. You are part of the solution of protecting victims rights. You are part of the process that helps victims and their families cope when they have been so terribly affected by criminal activity. You help put them on the path to recovery. You are the goodwill ambassadors who help survivors of violence regain confidence in themselves and in the system. You are the ones who offer comfort, advice and kindness to someone who's world has been suddenly and tragically altered. The types of advocacy you offer in this organization are as diverse as the people you help. Over 75 years ago, a rather small man stood on the back of a truck at the corner of Furnace Street and Howard and preached to whomever would listen about brother helping brother.

Enough people listened to and embraced his message? Enough to form the Furnace Street Mission. That man was Reverend Bill Denton. It was the Furnace Street Mission that served as the inspiration for Reverend Bill's son, Bob. Not only has Dr. Bob Denton kept the flame burning at the Furnace Street Mission, but he took his father's vision of a community reaching out to help those in need and created the victim assistance program...the first and the best of its kind, and I am very happy to be here today to congratulate Reverend Denton, his staff and the volunteers who contribute so much to making Summit County a great place to live.

Thank you.