

## **Powerful Impact of Early Childhood Experiences Explored at United Way Annual Meeting**

A leading national neuroscientist and a sociology professor from Bowdoin College gave a joint address to United Way of Mid Coast Maine's annual meeting on: "Early Childhood Experiences: What's at Stake for our Community's Health and Education."

"A healthier population begins with reducing toxic stress – and its causes – in early childhood, not just trying to change adult behavior," said Craig McEwen, Bowdoin College Professor of Political Economy and Sociology.

Craig's brother Bruce McEwen, head of the Harold and Margaret Hatch Laboratory of Neuroendocrinology at The Rockefeller University, showed the audience of approximately 150 community and business leaders how children's developing brains are affected by situations of extreme stress, such as severe poverty, abuse or neglect, severe maternal depression, substance abuse or family violence. "Without the support of a caring network of adults, toxic stress can disrupt brain architecture," said McEwen, including the areas of the brain most critical for success in school, work, and behavior.

"Among the many things that are connected to early life stress are alcoholism and drug abuse later in life," said Bruce McEwen. "But these experiences also lead to dramatically increased odds of having a range of physical health problems as adults – cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, obesity, and cancer. Prevention is the only way we can save our health care costs."

"We know that later remediation will be more costly and difficult than preventive intervention in the first years of life," said Craig McEwen, who praised the work done by United Way, its *Success By 6* initiative and its partner agencies to provide home visitors to new parents, offer high-quality child care, and promote reading to children from birth. "Investments by communities matter – and the earlier the better."

"It's a thrill to be in a community like this one where people are really pulling together to do the right thing," added Bruce McEwen.

Board Chair Glenn Hutchinson, President and CEO of Bath Savings Institution, thanked the speakers, gave an overview of results achieved by United Way and its partner agencies over the last year, and referred to the new Annual Report available on its website, [www.uwmcm.org](http://www.uwmcm.org).

Hutchinson also thanked United Way's Director of Community Impact and *Success By 6*, Peter Lindsay, for 20 years of service with the organization. Lindsay received a standing ovation from the gathering.

Receiving United Way's annual Community Builder Awards were: the CASH Coalition, which has helped over 1,600 low-income working people receive over \$1.7 million in Earned Income Tax Credits; Bath Savings Institution, which in addition to providing \$250,000 a year in charitable donations also provides almost 3,000 volunteer hours from among its employees; and Bath Police Chief Mike Field and Sagadahoc County Sheriff Joel Merry, who were honored for their extensive involvements helping local youth, elders, and people with mental health problems.

“Mike and Joel clearly believe in the importance of strong community connections as a way of preventing crime – in fact, they embody those connections,” said United Way Executive Director Barbara Reinertsen in presenting the Awards.

Also at the meeting, Pam Bowerman, Vice President of Norway Savings Bank, was elected as Chair of United Way’s Board of Directors, Bob Beaumont and Dennis Unger of University College at Bath/Brunswick were elected as First and Second Vice Chairs, and Bob McCue of Mid Coast Health Services was elected as Treasurer.

Dorothy Jones of Brunswick and Robin White of Parkview Adventist Medical Center were elected to the Board of Directors. Bob Beaumont, Bob McCue, Craig McEwen, Dennis Unger and Susan Wygal were re-elected to the Board.

United Way of Mid Coast Maine’s mission is to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities. In partnership with thousands of donors, United Way works on community solutions in the areas of education, financial stability, and health. It funds local programs that change thousands of lives in Brunswick and Harpswell, Sagadahoc and Lincoln Counties.