

Community kitchen founder speaks at Community First Fund awards luncheon

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In his youth, **Robert Egger** dreamed of running an upscale establishment along the lines of Rick's Café Américain, made famous by Humphrey Bogart in "Casablanca."

Instead, the 53-year-old Egger, of Washington, D.C., has made a name for himself in another way.

In 1989, he founded and is president of the "DC Central Kitchen," the country's first "community kitchen."



Robert Egger

It's where food donated by hospitality businesses and farms is used by a culinary arts job-training program — and helps unemployed men and women learn marketable skills, changing their lives forever, and for the better.

Egger was the keynote speaker Friday at the annual awards luncheon for Lancaster's **Community First Fund**, a nonprofit lender that since 1992 has dispensed \$40 million in loans.

Egger spoke to more than 400 economic and community development leaders from Lancaster to as far away as Delaware at the Marriott Lancaster at Penn Square.

"How do we get so fooled," he wondered, by trying to believe the idea that "if I just made more money or got more stuff, I'd be happy."

We need to get past the idea, especially with the current tough national economy, that businesses make money and community organizations simply "do good deeds," he said.

Instead, charities and businesses, with volunteers, "can work together to make things together," he said.

Since opening 22 years ago, Egger's kitchen has produced more than 23 million meals and helped 800 men and women gain full-time employment.

He has helped guide many people who "don't want to stay home, but instead want to contribute to the community," he said during his 20-minute speech.

Egger's book on the nonprofit sector, "Begging for Change: The Dollars and Sense of Making Nonprofits Responsive, Efficient and Rewarding For All," won the 2005 McAdam Prize for best nonprofit management book by one top alliance.

Details on his kitchen and other efforts are available at www.robtegger.org.

Along with hosting the nationally known speaker, the Community First Fund also gave these awards in honor of **James Hyson**, the organization's founder:

- **Cynthia Kettering**, president of operations for the Bagnall Shaw Corp., won the Advocate Award for her continued support of the fund and its clients.

- Lancaster developer **John Meeder** won the Community Development Award for his impact on the city.

- And **Steven and Peggy Robbins**, owners of Universal Service Enterprise in Hanover, won the Entrepreneur Award for their dedication to their 27 part-time employees, personal sacrifice and spirit of entrepreneurship.

The Community First Fund serves 13 regional counties and provides business

financing, training and one-on-one counseling to entrepreneurs, affordable-housing and commercial real estate developers and community groups.

"While we have grown a great deal over these past 19 years, our approach remains exactly the same ... we start with 'Community First,' " said **Daniel Betancourt**, the organization's president and chief executive officer.

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Read more: http://lancasteronline.com/article/local/491868_Community-kitchen-founder-speaks-at-Community-First-Fund-awards-luncheon.html#ixzz1d1xjhnZF