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## **UCM reaffirms its commitment**

By NORMA MENDOZA , [njmendoza@aol.com](mailto:njmendoza@aol.com)

### **Group seeks better way of life for the Metro East**

In its fifth annual Public Action Meeting Sunday, the United Congregations of Metro East reaffirmed its commitment to the improvement of education, health care and job opportunities and called upon legislators and public officials to make it happen.

UCM also expressed appreciation to those in attendance who continue to support its mission of being a voice of justice for the people of southwestern Illinois.

The organization was formed more than five years ago to bring people together to work for justice for everyone, transcending their differences and working to achieve their common goals.

In a Power Point presentation, UCM celebrated its successes, including:

- An agreement guaranteeing pre-apprenticeship training and contractor incentives to ensure that 30 percent of the construction jobs on the Interstate 64 improvement project are for those with low income, people of color, and women. Gained Sen. James Clayborne's and Rep. Jay Hoffman's support of UCM's Jobs Now program that would bring a similar guarantee for infrastructure projects in Illinois.
- Continued funding for the Madison County Drug Court and the establishment of a similar program in St. Clair County.
- A rebate from AmerenIP to help offset the large increase in electric bills and legislation to change the way utility companies purchase power.
- Making public picnic pavilions, restrooms and parking in O'Fallon City Park accessible to wheel chairs and folks with mobility issues.
- The Illinois Adequate Health Care Task Force developed a plan for Illinois Covered, an affordable health care program that would be accessible to all Illinoisans. (The legislation to establish the program is caught up in the power struggle over the state budget and so far, has not passed.)
- O'Fallon withdrawal of city ordinance that would have permitted shutoff of water service to customers who had unpaid bills for other services unrelated to water service.

UCM has added an Immigration Task Force to work on complicated immigration issues.

The organization continues to press for a solution to the dilemma of students in Venice who have no school now.

UCM continues to support expansion of SCHIP, the State Children's Health Insurance Program that is federally funded. Recent legislation to extend coverage to 6 million more children passed both Houses of Congress only to be vetoed by President George W. Bush, who has vowed to veto any other attempts to expand SCHIP.

The group is working with the Sierra Club on the promotion of the Cool Cities program, aimed at reducing pollution. UCM vows to promote environmental awareness within its 25 member congregations and encourage eco-centered worship and spirituality within the churches.

UCM's latest effort to fund its activities involves the use of the Internet and eScrip, which allows a percentage of spending at certain local businesses to be a donation to UCM. For details about the program, go to [www.escrip.com](http://www.escrip.com) and use the ID number 500016830 or put United Congregations as the Group Name.

In addition to the estimated 500 or more in attendance, several elected officials were present, including County Clerk Mark Von Nida, Madison County Regional Superintendent of Schools Robert Daiber, Madison County Board members Brenda Roosevelt and Joyce Fitzgerald, O'Fallon Alderman John West, and Paul Cerpa, director of the Office of Business and Workforce Diversity, for the Illinois Department of Transportation.

U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello and state Rep; Jay Hoffman sent letters of support and Gov. Rod Blagojevich sent a spokesperson to voice his determination to continue to fight for the enactment of Illinois Covered.

East St. Louis Mayor Alvin Parks invited everyone to participate in a rally to protest plans to close Kenneth Hall Regional Medical Center.

"We will meet in the City Hall rotunda at 11:30 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 9, Parks said. "We will march from there to Kenneth Hall Regional Hospital for the rally."

The Rev. Myron Taylor, pastor of New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church of East St. Louis, said plans to merge Kenneth Hall and Touchette Hospital and then to close both and open a new hospital in Sauget would be devastating, not only to the people of East St. Louis, but to the many travelers who pass through East St. Louis on the interstate highways and to the people who work in the Federal Building, the Post Office, Social Security, the Regional State Building, the Casino Queen, City Hall and in all of the small businesses of the city.

"They want to move the trauma center out of East St. Louis, with a population of 30,000, to Sauget, with a population of 200," Taylor said. "There was no consultation with leaders of our affected communities. Our citizens weren't given a chance to participate in this process. I think that is disrespectful to the citizens of our communities."