

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Patricia Azriel
Director of Communications

pazriel@yccf.org

717.848.3733

OR

Bryan K. Tate
Vice President of Philanthropy

btate@yccf.org

717.848.3733

April 29, 2011

York Factory Whistle Concert Will Continue for Generations
A Fund at the Community Foundation will ensure the concert continues each year

York, PA — It is only April, but it seems like Christmas in July - the York Factory Whistle Concert, which was in danger of losing its funding for its traditional Christmas morning concerts, has been saved. The Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area today signed an agreement to create the **York Factory Whistle Concert Fund**, an endowment at York County Community Foundation that will ensure funding for the concert in perpetuity.

York County Community Foundation worked closely with the Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area and the Engineering Society of York to work out a way to save the concert, which has been heard far and wide since the 1920s at 12:15 a.m. Christmas morning. Each year, the Community Foundation will make a grant from the York Factory Whistle Concert Fund to pay for the concert, while growing the endowment to ensure the concert's future. The Engineering Society of York has signed on to run the annual concert event, which has become a York County treasure and tradition.

Many people believed Christmas 2010 would be the last time they would hear the former steam whistle concert, which was performed using compressed air for the first time in its long history. The concert was performed, as per tradition for the past 20 years, by Whistle Master Donald E. Ryan on the New York Wire Company's historic factory whistle. Ryan helped his father with the concert beginning in 1955 and took over the concert in 1990.

The Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area has coordinated the concert since 2006, when it rescued the event after a boiler breakdown the previous year. Since then, the Heritage Area raised \$60,000 in support of the concert. The switch from steam to compressed air lowers the cost of the annual event from about \$15,000 to approximately \$1,200.

Those wishing to make donations to the fund can make their tax-deductible contributions to: **York County Community Foundation, 14 W. Market St., York, PA 17401**. Please designate York Factory Whistle Concert Fund on the memo line of your check. **You may also donate online at www.yccf.org/give_online.asp** and designate your gift to the York Factory Whistle Concert Fund.

(more)

Background:

The Christmas carols are played annually at 12:15 a.m. on December 25 on the factory whistle located atop the New York Wire Company plant at 441 East Market Street, York. On a clear night, Yorkers can hear the music within a five-mile radius and residents ten and twelve miles away report hearing the carols as well. In recent years, approximately 100 tailgaters have begun parking in adjacent streets and parking lots to enjoy the concert. Tailgaters applaud the concert by honking their horns.

In the 1920s, York music teacher Karl Alex Smyser began the Christmas concert tradition that Yorkers have grown to love. Whistle Masters Marlin L. and Donald E. Ryan began the playing of Christmas morning carols in 1955. After 35 years, Marlin Ryan retired from the tradition. Donald, with assistance from his children has continued the legacy. Only twice during the past 54 years have concerts been canceled due to problems with the boiler (1986 and 2005).

Although the New York Wire Company's whistle no longer signals workers' shifts and the factory's 59-year-old boiler no longer heats the facility, both industrial relics were maintained by the company for years to keep the revered Christmas concert tradition alive. In 2005, the boiler, which provided steam for the whistle, failed shortly before the concert's start, forcing its cancellation. Repair costs for the old boiler proved to be excessive, with no assurance against future problems.

To avoid losing the Factory Whistle Concert tradition, in 2006 the Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area (formerly Lancaster-York Heritage Region) coordinated with the New York Wire Company and Worden & Shewell to save this community event. They used a 21st century solution – installation of new permanent steam and electrical connections to the exterior of the factory, where a state-of-the-art, portable oil boiler system was trucked in and connected to make steam for the concert. The portable boiler solution enabled the event to continue from 2006 - 2009, until 2010, when the whistle was converted from steam to compressed air.

-30-

Celebrating 50 years of philanthropy in 2011, York County Community Foundation creates a vibrant York County by engaging donors, providing community leadership, and investing in high impact initiatives while building endowment for future generations. York County Community Foundation granted \$2.5 million in 2010.