

RIDE METRO

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Akron METRO Regional
Transit Authority



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STAY CONNECTED STAY SOCIAL



ROLLING ACRES
METRO RTA

ANNUAL
REPORT
2021

A LETTER FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

To Our Community,

If you are reading this, you are part of our community: the community of people who benefit from and value the importance of equitable transit opportunities in our region. As we continued to navigate one of the most tumultuous times in our country's history, METRO never stopped and never wavered, supporting more than 3 million trips in 2021. Didn't ride? Not everyone did, but having equitable transportation that provides access to opportunity is beneficial for all.

Amid the ongoing pandemic, METRO partnered on many levels and with many of our stakeholders to:

- Take care of our people;
- Be there for METRO's transit-loyal passengers; and,
- Build strong partnerships within our community.

Despite another year filled with uncertainties and unexpected challenges, one thing remained clear: it is our responsibility to meet the changing transportation needs of the

community. We recognize that transportation needs span the length of the entire year, prompting the decision to provide transit service on three major holidays. METRO is fully committed to providing reliable

transportation for the community. The dedication of our bus operators, maintenance, customer care, vehicle services, and administrative teams to providing safe and reliable transportation for the community received recognition from national, state, and local organizations through various awards, including the American Public Transportation Association's Gold Security and Gold Safety Awards. These prestigious awards are a true testament of METRO's dedication to safety, and we are honored to be nationally-recognized for safety and security.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and all METRO team members, we thank you for being our partner. We are excited to have you ride along with us as we continue on the path to a prosperous future. We might even say it's electric!

Robert DeJournett,
Board President



Dawn Distler,
CEO




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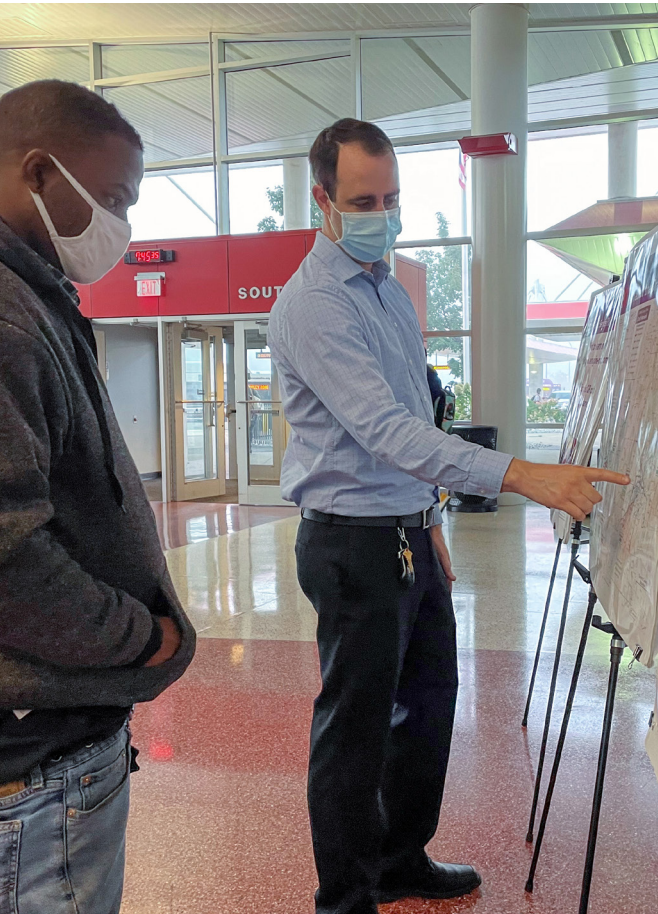
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Our Partnerships





- Access, Inc.
- Adult Protective Services
- Age Friendly Advisory Council
- Akron Blind Center
- Akron Children's Hospital
- Akron Civic Theatre
- Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority
- Akron Public Schools
- Akron Police Department
- Akron-Summit County Public Library
- Akron Urban League
- Akron Zoo
- Allstate
- American Public Transportation Association
- Arts Now
- Barberton Public Library
- Black Pages of Ohio - Summit Magazine
- Bridges of Summit County Initiative
- Bridges Out of Poverty
- CANAPI
- City of Akron Commission on Aging
- Cleveland Clinic Foundation
- Community Action Akron Summit
- CSE Credit Union
- Cuyahoga Falls Public Library
- Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad
- Direction Home Advisory Council
- Department of Jobs and Family Services
- Downtown Akron Partnership
- Elevate Greater Akron
- Full Term First Birthday Community Action Team
- GAR Foundation
- Goodwill Industries of Akron
- Greater Akron Chamber
- Highland Square Neighborhood Association
- Leadership Akron
- Life Services
- Lincoln Financial
- Living Green Task Force
- Local Emergency Planning Committee
- Medical Mutual
- NEORide
- Northeast Ohio Travel Trainers
- Not Just October
- Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services
- Ohio Erie Canal and Railway
- Ohio Public Transit Association
- Ohio Transit Risk Pool
- Oswald
- Project Ujima
- RAISE Good Jobs For Greater Akron
- Safe Kids
- Summa Health
- Summit County Elder Abuse Interdisciplinary Team
- Summit County Public Health
- Summit County Sheriff's Office
- Senior Independent Living Center
- Stark State College
- Stow-Munroe Falls Public Library
- Summit County Drug Task Force
- Summit County Stand Down
- Summit Metro Parks
- Summit Lake CDC
- Summit Probate Court
- TL Worldwide
- Towpath Credit Union
- Twinsburg Public Library
- The University of Akron
- United Way of Summit County
- Women's Transportation Seminar



Reimagine METRO

Come along for the ride!

2021 AT A GLANCE

-  **3,046,980** boardings
-  **171,757** student boardings
-  **5,696,389** miles traveled
-  **7,570** bikes transported

-  **260,981** Customer Care responses to inquiries about fixed-route and demand response service
-  **873,000** Facebook and Twitter impressions
-  **30** community events
-  **481** online survey responses

Another year full of uncertainties didn't stall METRO from barreling forward in reimagining public transit's role in Summit County.

Reimagine METRO, a key step in implementing the agency's 10-year Strategic Plan, is an initiative geared towards providing more useful transit service to residents and visitors of Summit County. The project began with the development of a Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) that examined METRO's current services alongside extensive transit market research. The COA identified the opportunity to improve service through a redesigned suite of mobility services and enhanced community partnerships.

In July, a core group of METRO team members gathered for a workshop to redesign METRO's current fixed-route network to align with the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan. This first version of the Draft Reimagined Network was designed to make transit more useful to more people by expanding access to more destinations and opportunities.

The Draft Reimagined Network was presented to METRO team members, stakeholders, passengers, and community members through a series of employee inreach and public outreach events. These included focus groups, webinars, [surveys](#), and conversations including "Buses & Brews," where METRO sought public input by bringing conversations about the future of public transit to local coffee shops and breweries. Nearly 60% of public and stakeholder feedback indicated the Draft Reimagined Network contained a healthy balance of high frequency and coverage service. As inreach and outreach efforts concluded, the team sifted through feedback to incorporate in the final Draft Reimagined Network.

With phase one in the rearview mirror, the second phase of Reimagine METRO will explore possibilities for METRO's demand response programs and expanded fixed-route services if additional resources are available in the future. METRO looks forward to presenting its final plans and implementation strategy to the community in 2022.

Holiday Bus Service

They asked, we answered. In 2021, METRO proudly provided regular bus service on selected holidays: Martin Luther King Jr., Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day. As done in previous years, buses followed a limited schedule on Thanks-Friday (the day after Thanksgiving) and Christmas Eve.

Prompted by customer feedback, providing holiday bus service marked the first step in investing in bus service as outlined in the Strategic Plan. In a series of public outreach surveys in 2020, 43% of online survey respondents said their primary mode of transportation is transit. More than 90% identified themselves as daily or regular transit users. With so many transit-loyal customers, METRO was proud to provide holiday bus service so the community we serve can get to work, the grocery store, community events, and more.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., DAY

6,051 boardings

INDEPENDENCE DAY

1,941 boardings

LABOR DAY

4,365 boardings

THANKS-FRIDAY

5,599 boardings

CHRISTMAS EVE

4,959 boardings

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS



The announcement of a COVID-19 vaccine in late 2020 injected a sliver of hope into the world. After nearly a year of the pandemic, normalcy was only one – or three – shots away.

When the vaccine was initially authorized for emergency use, METRO utilized its demand response services to transport eligible individuals to Summit County Public Health (SCPH). As vaccination efforts ramped up in early 2021, public transit agencies aided community-wide efforts to increase vaccine access, awareness, and education.

In March, METRO was awarded \$327,060 through the Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) Rides for Community

Immunity program to ensure all residents had access to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Funding supported free transportation to and from COVID-19 vaccination appointments and clinics on all METRO services, alleviating the burden for community members. METRO fulfilled more than 1,500 vaccine trips on fixed-route and demand response services.

As the vaccine availability and eligibility expanded, SCPH opened a mass vaccination site at the Summit County Fairgrounds. METRO provided free shuttles from the Independence Transit Center to the Fairgrounds, in addition to community shuttles from underserved neighborhoods and senior centers to vaccination sites. More than 360 trips were

made on the dedicated vaccine shuttles, made possible through a partnership with ODOT's Rides for Community Immunity program. METRO further supported SCPH's goal to improve vaccine access by hosting four pop-up vaccination clinics at the Robert K. Pfaff Transit Center, incentivizing those who received the vaccine with a variety of bus passes. The pop-up clinics successfully reached more than 400 individuals.

These efforts exemplify the key role public transportation played in ensuring equitable vaccine access and distribution to communities nationwide, and METRO was proud to help build the bridge to a brighter, healthier future in Summit County.

Care-A-Van

On May 29, a caravan of cars and a METRO bus, called "Care-A-Van," traveled to three Akron neighborhoods in effort to provide accurate information about COVID-19 and offer on-site vaccinations administered by Summit County Public Health. The event was part of the "KNOW COVID" campaign funded by the GAR Foundation. Participants enjoyed free giveaways, prizes, and refreshments while getting their COVID-19-related questions answered by medical professionals.



KNOW COVID

METRO is proud to be a part of the KNOW COVID art initiative. We supplied the bus shelter "canvas" on Copley Road and artist Derin Fletcher supplied the vision. Thank you to ArtsNow, Project Ujima, Summit County Public Health, and the GAR Foundation for making this project a reality.

SAFETY & SECURITY



2021 was a record-breaking year for safety and security at METRO RTA.

METRO was declared the Gold Winner in both Bus Safety Excellence and Bus Security Excellence from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). These prestigious awards recognize transit providers as models of excellence in the industry for their innovative and proactive safety and security programs.

strengthen safety and security procedures at all METRO properties and facilities. The Transit Police Department introduced body cameras in October, supported by the Ohio Law Enforcement Body Armor grant program.

From becoming a nationally-recognized organization to reaching significant milestones, the team's success is a direct reflection of their daily commitment and dedication to ensure METRO buses and facilities are safe spaces for all.

Safety & Security Statistics

- **9** operators achieved 20+ years of safe driving (years without preventable accidents)
- **17%** decrease in preventable accidents from 2020's record performance
- **20%** increase in miles between preventable accidents from 2020



The team was applauded for implementing its Security Incident Program, Banned Passenger Program, various operator and community trainings onboard buses, and internal safety campaigns over the last three years. METRO's robust operator training and internal safety campaigns have proven to be successful, as the team surpassed a 2020 record by logging zero preventable accidents in June and October 2021.

When it comes to transit safety and security, no detail is too small. Installation of real-time video surveillance on all METRO buses was completed in 2021, allowing officers responding to security-related incidents to be equipped with more information prior to arriving on scene. The surveillance system has proven to significantly deter security and safety-related incidents from happening onboard. Furthermore, monitors were installed on fixed-route buses for passengers to see what is happening on the bus as they ride. Videos may be downloaded while the bus is still running, regardless of location, allowing for an expedited response to incidents and identifying potential suspects.

Over the summer, METRO added two transit police officers to its growing force to



Safety Videos

Visit METRO's YouTube channel to learn more about METRO's award-winning safety and security efforts.

Banners at RKP

New banners were installed at the Robert K. Pfaff Transit Center in 2021 highlighting METRO team members across the organization.

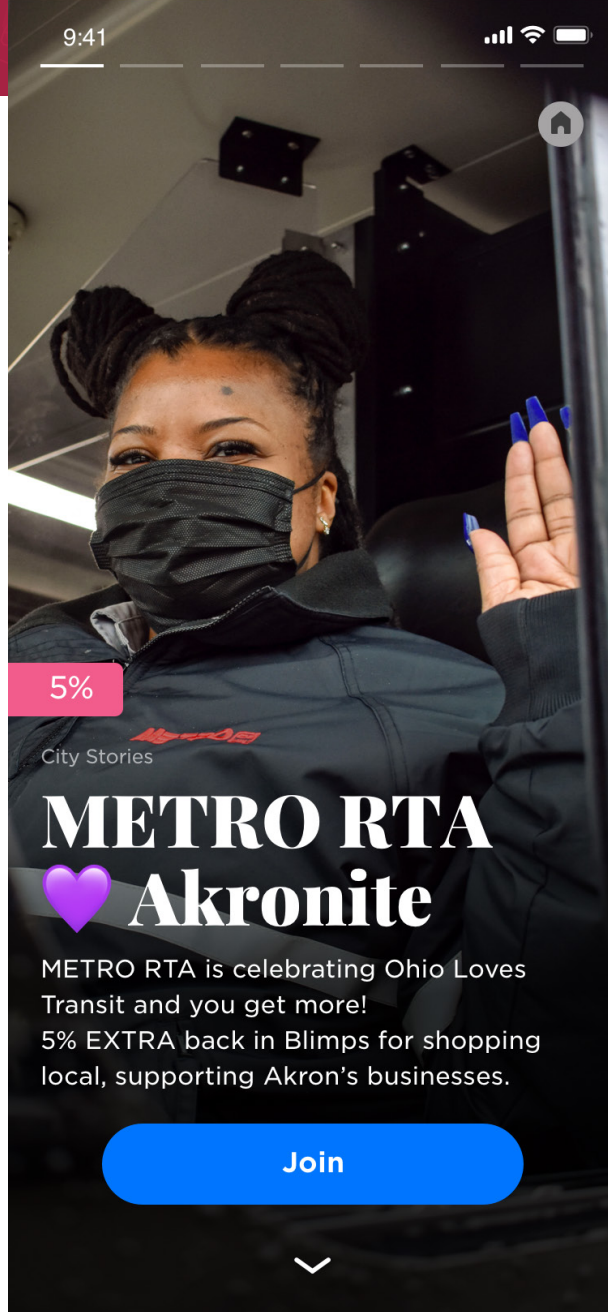
OHIO LOVES TRANSIT

The 2021 Valentine's season centered on the heart and soul of our community: small businesses and public transportation.

Ohio Loves Transit, an annual initiative hosted by the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA), promotes the need for public transit and demonstrates how investing in transit benefits the community. The week of Valentine's Day, METRO partnered with the City of Akron to promote Ohio Loves Transit by sponsoring a reward offer in the Akronite app. The app, designed to propel the resurgence of small businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, incentivizes Akronites to shop locally by rewarding them with "blimps" that are redeemable at more than 120 participating businesses in the mobile app.

Once users joined the Ohio Loves Transit reward offer, they were eligible to receive an extra 5 percent off their purchase at participating businesses in the Akronite app and were rewarded with up to four "blimps" to use on a later purchase. The reward offer was valid throughout the month of February.

In celebration of Valentine's Day, METRO waived bus fares on all services on February 12, resulting in more than 8,300 trips countywide.



State Lobbying for Increased Transportation Budget Investment

In February, the fate of public transportation in Ohio became uncertain when Governor Mike DeWine's proposed biennial budget slashed transit funding by nearly 90% compared to funds allocated in 2019 – from \$70 million to \$7.3 million. Transit agencies, their partners, and other stakeholders statewide united in the fight to restore dedicated public transit funding.

Through extraordinary advocacy efforts, the Ohio House of Representatives' Finance Committee subsequently increased funding in the revised budget. METRO collaborated with neighboring transit systems PARTA (Portage County) and SARTA (Stark County) to publish an editorial strongly encouraging the Ohio Senate and Governor DeWine to support the revised budget, assigned House Bill 74. The editorial, which included testimonies from transit riders, garnered the attention of various local media outlets and national trade publications.

In March, METRO CEO Dawn Distler joined her transit peers in testifying

to the Ohio Senate Transportation Committee the essential nature of public transit and the need for increased funding as outlined in House Bill 74, Ohio's Fiscal Year 2022-2023 transportation budget. Advocacy efforts were deemed successful when the bill was signed into law on March 31, 2021. The budget includes \$70 million earmarked to public transportation, which will help secure the future of essential public transit services for METRO and Summit County.

Transit Employee Appreciation Day

METRO joined transit systems nationwide in celebrating Transit Employee Appreciation Day on March 18. The day commemorates transit team members who work tirelessly around the clock to keep our communities moving.

METRO hosted a snack bar and distributed METRO embroidered blankets to team members as a way to show its gratitude. Yard signs were on display throughout the community to garner public support and appreciation.



No Drivers License

The makers of "All About That Bus" and "Hello METRO" present "No Drivers License," a parody of "Drivers License" by Olivia Rodrigo. Follow the story as a METRO passenger relives memories of her romance on a METRO bus, then watches the one she loves move on – without her.

FARES, FLEET & FACILITIES

EZFARE UPDATES

Paying for your bus fare got even “EZier” in 2021

On April 12, METRO activated mobile ticketing validators on buses for EZfare customers. Once a ticket/bus pass is purchased and activated in the EZfare app, passengers scan the ticket barcode on the validator upon boarding. These validators were purchased with the support of the Integrated Mobility Innovation (IMI) grant, a multi-year grant shared by 10 other transit providers from the Federal Transit Administration.

In effort to ensure equitable fare payment options for all, the platform expanded in July to allow passengers to add funds on their mobile ticketing account using a credit card or cash. Cash users can visit the Robert K. Pfaff Transit Center or a partnering VanillaDirect retail location – Dollar General, Family Dollar, Kum & Go, Speedway, Walgreens, CVS, or 7-Eleven – to pay for a ticket on EZfare or load money on their account.

Since its inception in 2019, the EZfare mobile ticketing app has not only expedited the

boarding process, but also provided a seamless and contactless way for passengers to pay for their bus fares. The free mobile application, used by METRO and 13 other agencies across Ohio, Kentucky, and Michigan, is also integrated in Moovit, Transit, and Uber apps, allowing users to purchase their bus fare and plan their trip in one app.

 **250,000 EZfare tickets activated**

GRANTS

American Rescue Plan Act **\$31,200,000**
Provided by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), this grant supported critical public transit operations to keep the region moving as the COVID-19 pandemic continued.

ODOT Rides to Community Immunity Program **\$327,060**
The state-issued award supported operating expenses for free COVID-related transportation and medical trips on all METRO services.

Low or No Emission Vehicle Award **\$616,000**
Provided by the FTA, this grant supported the purchase of two additional 40-foot electric buses.

ODOT Urban Transit Program (UTP) **\$1,037,827**
Provided by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), this grant supported critical public transit operations to keep the region moving as the COVID-19 pandemic continued.

Ohio EPA Diesel Emission Reductions Grant (DERG) **\$1,709,421**
Provided by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), this grant supported critical public transit operations to keep the region moving as the COVID-19 pandemic continued.

Ohio Transit Partnership Program (OTP2) **\$1,045,500**
State funding supported the design of a 90,000 square foot, energy-efficient Maintenance and Operations Facility that will support the goals of METRO's Strategic Plan. Funding also supported information technology upgrades across all METRO facilities, a portion of the CNG large bus replacement, and a portion of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) feasibility study.



Sherrod Brown Visits METRO

Senator Sherrod Brown visited METRO headquarters in September to discuss how dedicated public transit funding in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill would support initiatives outlined in METRO's Strategic Plan. The bill, passed by Congress in November 2021, guarantees \$89.9 billion in funding for public transit over the next five years – the largest federal investment in public transit in U.S. history. The Senator got a glimpse of an electric bus model and proposed new facility plans to support METRO's efforts to become Summit County's regional mobility provider. He concluded his visit with a bus ride around downtown Akron.

Opening of the Independence Transit Center

On January 3, METRO opened the Independence Transit Center at 1280 Independence Avenue, Akron. The 2,500-square-foot hub provides a temperature-controlled indoor seating area for passengers to comfortably wait for their bus and protect them from the elements. METRO debuted digital signage at the facility to display real-time bus arrival and departure times for routes serving the area.



In June, METRO welcomed Barberton, Cuyahoga Falls, Twinsburg, and Stow-Munroe Falls public libraries to its Book It On METRO program. The four libraries joined Akron-Summit County Public Library, who pioneered Book It On METRO in September 2020. The program permits passengers with a valid library card a free ride on METRO fixed-routes on the first Thursday of the month.



OPTA CONFERENCE & EXCELLENCE AWARDS

In September, METRO had the pleasure of hosting transit professionals across the state for the annual Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA) Conference. The three-day event featured 24 panels and topic discussions, various industry tracks and presentations, networking sessions, social events, and an expo showcasing new products, vehicles, and technology at the John S. Knight Center. METRO CEO Dawn Distler and Akron-based media professionals were amongst the many panelists who spoke during the conference.

At the conclusion of the event, METRO board and team members were recognized with various honors during the OPTA Excellence Awards Ceremony and Luncheon.

Congratulations to the 2021 OPTA Excellence winners:

Chuck Rector | METRO Board of Trustee/Retiree

Leonard Ronis Award acknowledges Rector for his noteworthy accomplishments within the industry and his dedication to METRO and public transportation.

Mike Ripplinger | Journeyman Mechanic

Milestone Award for 30 years of service.

Jarrod Hampshire | Director of Maintenance

Four Under Forty Award recognizing Hampshire's achievements in transit and leading METRO's fleet and facilities to meet safety and modern standards.

METRO is proud of the commitment and dedication of its team members to lead the organization into the future.



Goodwill Award

METRO's Equity & Diversity Committee was recognized with Goodwill Industries of Akron's Employee of Distinction award for creating the organization's Racial & Social Equity Statement that was adopted by METRO's Board of Trustees in November 2020.

Akron Pride Festival Sponsorship & Equity March

On August 28, METRO team members joined a crowd of 25,000 people for the annual Akron Pride Festival and Equity March in downtown Akron. Team members, alongside a METRO bus, walked over half a mile with 2,000 other marchers from Spaghetti Warehouse to Lock 3 to kick-off the festival. METRO was proud to sponsor the event by waiving fares all day, allowing everyone to truly take pride in their ride.

"There is nothing as equitable as public transit," said METRO CEO Dawn Distler. "METRO welcomes all persons onboard, and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status. As a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community, I always look forward to the march and the festival as a way to be heard, to take a stand, and to march for equality for all."



Valerie Shea, 30 for the Future Award

METRO Director of Planning and Strategic Development Valerie Shea was a recipient of the Greater Akron Chamber's 30 for the Future award. The award recognizes young professionals who make an impact on the Greater Akron Region through leadership in their industry and community engagement. Shea and her peers were recognized October 7 at Canal Park.

Free Ride Partnerships

- Daniel Tiger
- Countryside Farmers' Markets
- Juneteenth Events
- Summit Lake Nature Center Grand Opening
- Porch Rkr
- Akron Pride Festival
- Sweet Sounds of Equality Concert
- Faith & Blue
- Kisling, Nestico & Redick Turkey Giveaway



Faith & Blue feat. METRO Transit Police

METRO Transit Police Chief Shawn Metcalf and Officer Reuben Woodruff were faithfully standing with area law enforcement and houses of worship on October 9 during the Faith & Blue initiative at The University of Akron Stille Athletics Field House. The event is geared toward building bridges between law enforcement and the community through the connections of local faith-based organizations.