

Op-Ed 2012

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A LOOK INSIDE OUR CAMPAIGN AND A MOMENT TO SAY THANK YOU

It's mid-November. Our United Way Work-Place Giving Campaign is winding down and the holidays are on their way. As we wrap up our campaign, which will take several months to collect all the pledge forms and process everything, I've been thinking about the multiple components that it takes to make it a success. Let me take you behind the scenes to show you the nuts and bolts that make this massive effort possible, and to take a moment to share our gratitude with a community that helps us advance Education, Income and Health for all.

We have five permanent staff members, and every Fall we bring on an additional six individuals who are either loaned to us by their employers or sponsored through our Community Builder Sponsorship Program. These temporary Campaign Executives are each responsible for conducting work-place giving campaigns in up to 30 local businesses. Every year this group undergoes training, interacts with hundreds of local employers, thousands of people, and ultimately is responsible for helping raise crucial dollars to impact our community. Over the 2 ½ months that they are with us we watch them transform. During our training this year one of our Campaign Executives mentioned that she could not believe that she lived in this community and had not realized that the average high school drop rate in our county is 30%, that 15% of people are living in poverty, and that access to dental and medical care are top needs for many individuals. Her experience gave her a much more accurate picture of our community and opened the door for her to see how people are coming together and making a difference.

The Campaign Executives are just one component of this project. Most of our participating organizations allow one of their employees, or a team of people, to donate their time to work on our campaign and champion it in their workplace, we call them Employee Campaign Coordinators (ECC). They distribute information to their fellow coworkers, hold events, and give everyone at their workplace the opportunity to contribute to the United Way Campaign. These individuals go above and beyond and range from executive staff to administrative assistants and everyone in between. We have ECC's who have received assistance after losing their home to a fire, gained stability after experiencing domestic violence, or whose children go to after school programs – there are so many individuals personally touched by a United Way funded program.

Our Speaker's Bureau is a group of volunteers who are local experts. Many of them are staff or volunteers for our United Way funded programs and they donate their time to join us at work-place events, present information on local issues, and show how we are collaborating to build a stronger community for all. This year we had late night events, early morning events, an all-day traveling tour of a local industrial facility, events in every corner of Whatcom County, and countless visits to every type of office that you can imagine. For all of our events, our Speakers went along with our Campaign Executives day and night, travelling all over our community because they see first-hand the lives changed by this important work.

Even further we have a Campaign Cabinet, Board of Directors, and a Campaign Chair who all volunteer their time and expertise to spread the word about the Campaign. And then, of course, we have the thousands of donors who contribute to this effort to make it possible for us to continue to invest in programs that help teens graduate, families rise out of poverty, and ensure access to a variety of health services.

So: hundreds of volunteers + thousands of donors + countless hours of staff time combine to create an effort that directly affects 150,000 Whatcom County residents and ripples outward to touch all of us in some way. During this time of year when we give thanks, let me take a moment to give my sincerest appreciation to all of you who have made this effort possible. It will be months before we know if we hit our Campaign Goal of \$2.2 Million, but in my mind the Campaign has already been a success. Seeing the variety of people with differing views, different priorities, and different economic situations all come together to say we care about this community and we are taking a stand to support Education, Income, and Health, in my eyes it doesn't get much more successful than that.

Peter Theisen, President

United Way of Whatcom County

United Way of Whatcom County has worked for over 50 years to improve lives by mobilizing individuals and organizations to create long-term change by investing in Education, Income and Health for all Whatcom County residents. To learn more about United Way of Whatcom County visit www.unitedwaywhatcom.org or check out their Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/UnitedWayWhatcom>

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