

Op-Ed 2014

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COMMUNITY GIVING: IT MATTERS

This time of year, with the holiday season rushing in, there is a lot of talk about giving— along with a constant stream of commercials, sales and coupons continually reminding us about all of the stuff to buy during this giving season. It's been estimated that the average person sees up to 5,000 ads per day. With so much stress and so much to do during the holiday season, it can be easy to forget the reason for the season – giving. You've probably heard of Black Friday and Cyber Monday. But did you know that now there is also a day dedicated to giving back to your community? That day is called #GivingTuesday, and it's today!

#GivingTuesday is a national movement with the sole purpose of reminding us that giving means more than buying various items and wrapping them in fancy paper. #GivingTuesday is a global day dedicated to giving back, a day for everyone around the world to celebrate generosity and to give what they can. It's a simple idea, and easy to participate. All you have to do is get together with your family, friends, business, church, school or other organization, make a donation back to our community, and then share your story and inspire others to do the same. And the best part about #GivingTuesday? No shopping required!

It's easy to understand why people enjoy picking out special gifts for friends and family. Giving feels good. The same holds true for community giving and philanthropy. People who donate, time, talent and money report higher levels of happiness and psychological wellbeing. Have you ever done something nice for a total stranger? It feels great, doesn't it? Now imagine if your good deed could actually change that person's life, putting them on a path toward graduating high school, achieving financial stability, or making healthier life choices? How fantastic would that feel? And what would it mean for the community where that person lives and works? Even better— what if more people took the time to give in this way? What might our community look like? Imagine a Whatcom County where every child has the resources to start school ready to learn, and make it all the way through high school. Where every family has a safe, warm place to call home. Where individuals are healthy enough to get up and go to work or school each day, contributing to the community in active, positive ways. This is my hope, and it's why I support United Way of Whatcom County, both at work through financial contributions and on my own time as a volunteer.

As a longtime United Way supporter and US Bank employee, I am proud to work for a company that is willing to come together in support of United Way of Whatcom County's efforts to raise the levels of Education, Income and Health for all of us who live and work here. Supporting United Way's efforts to build a stronger community doesn't

just feel good, it makes good sense. Choosing to invest in the education, financial wellbeing and health of Whatcom County kids and families yields a huge return— not just for individuals who are struggling but for all of us. Think about what happens when an at-risk teen gets back on track to graduate and what it means for that student's family and future. Now think about helping hard-working individuals and families achieve financial stability, and how that affects neighborhoods, schools and the economy. When communities are prosperous and healthy, we all benefit.

United Way knows that if we all pitch in, we can make a huge difference. I am proud to say that US Bank and its employees are creating lasting, positive change in Whatcom County by giving through United Way's annual workplace campaign. If you are part of a local company, big or small, I invite you to join us, along with hundreds of other businesses, organizations and volunteers who are making a positive impact every day by giving to United Way. If your employer runs a United Way campaign, I encourage you to give to the United Way's Community Impact Fund, keeping in mind that 100% of those dollars stay in Whatcom County supporting our families, friends and neighbors. If your employer isn't involved with United Way, consider finding out if they would like to be. It's a great way to build team spirit and a strong community— all at the same time! If you're self-employed, retired, or just want to do something that feels great, you can give online at www.unitedwaywhatcom.org. While you're there, click around to see how your donation supports an amazing network of agencies and organizations all working together on current and crucial issues to make lasting change.

As United Way wraps up this year's Campaign I encourage you to make your gift to this organization that is about more than short term charity for a few, they are about lasting solutions that build a stronger community for us all. The more dollars United Way can raise for their Community Impact Fund the more programs and strategies that they can partner with to continue to produce amazing life-changing results. If you already support United Way of Whatcom County, Thank You! You are truly making a difference for all of us. If you haven't made a United Way gift in the past, #GivingTuesday is the perfect time to start.

Peggy Onustack
United Way of Whatcom County Board Chair
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About the Author

Peggy Onustack is the current Chair of the Board of Directors for United Way of Whatcom County and she is also a local Vice President and District Manager of US Bank.

About United Way of Whatcom County

United Way of Whatcom County runs more than 150 workplace giving campaigns during the fall to benefit Whatcom County's Community Impact Fund, which focuses on education, income, and health. For more information about conducting a United Way workplace campaign or for more information about United Way of Whatcom County, go online to www.unitedwaywhatcom.org

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