

Op-Ed 2013

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UNITED WAY: WORKING YEAR ROUND TO CREATE A STRONGER COMMUNITY

It's been 3 months since we kicked-off this year's United Way Campaign and we have seen tremendous generosity of time, energy, and spirit. With presentations at over 90 workplaces, our Campaign Executives and Community Speakers have gone above and beyond to offer our community an opportunity to participate in a movement that is advancing education, income, and health for all Whatcom County residents.

This fall we have seen a variety of community members speak up in support of United Way's work, lend their time and talents to conduct workplace giving campaigns, and open their hearts to give what they can. We have also had community members from non-profits, government, and the business world share their time and expertise to provide information on current community issues by volunteering to speak at our workplace events. These events took our crew all over the county. From Sumas to Bellingham, Ferndale to Lynden. No work-place is too small or too far for us to visit and share our passion. For all of these efforts and to all of the people who have given, advocated, and volunteered for this year's Campaign, we extend our deepest thanks and appreciation. Your work has improved lives and changed our entire community for the better. If you haven't been involved yet, there is still time to join us in this community wide effort. I encourage you to consider giving to United Way of Whatcom County's Community Impact Fund.

Many people ask what programs United Way funds and what programs we don't fund. The answer varies from year to year, as community needs and issues change. Because there is no one program that can do it all, our local non-profits all work together in a collaborative network to ensure progress and success. United Way knows that it takes a variety of solutions to affect change. The great thing about the Community Impact Fund is that it's invested in a wide range of programs designed to achieve specific goals right here in Whatcom County. Our efforts are not about one specific program. They are about connecting and supporting a diverse group of effective and efficient programs to improve access to quality early learning programs, increase the high school graduation rate, create financially stable and self-sufficient families, and ensure healthy and safe individuals who are able to thrive in our community.

Who makes the decisions on how to invest these Community Impact dollars? You do. Our Fund Distribution Committee consists of 50+ local volunteers who participate in training, review the materials and visit program sites

ultimately making the final recommendations for funding. Any interested community member is welcome to serve on this committee, which is an amazing way to see the interconnected nature of our programs and the impact of our work.

This year, we are restructuring our grant process and opening up new opportunities for partnership with United Way of Whatcom County. By aligning our work more closely with the Community Health Improvement Plan, we will provide a framework for local organizations to collectively work together to impact the most important issues in our community. We will also be working more closely with our supporting workplaces to share how their gifts are being invested to build a stronger community.

While the United Way Campaign takes place in the fall, the board and staff are working throughout the year to stay current on community issues and stay connected with programs. United Way provides support and services throughout the year to continually strengthen our non-profit sector.

I would like to invite you to not only give to this year's United Way Campaign, but to stay updated on United Way's work throughout the year. It takes all of us working together to give, advocate, and volunteer to create change and inspire hope for a better tomorrow. We know it's possible because we have seen it: large and small companies pitching in what they can, individuals giving their time on our Fund Distribution Committee, Leadership Donors pledging \$1,000 or more, and speakers taking the time to share our work with the community. When everyone pitches in we all benefit. That's what it means to LIVE UNITED!

About the Author

Scott Corzine is a Major Account Executive with Puget Sound Energy and is also the Chair of the United Way of Whatcom County Board of Directors. United Way of Whatcom County runs 150 workplace giving campaigns during the fall to benefit Whatcom County's Community Impact Fund, which focuses on advancing education, income, and health. For more information about conducting a United Way workplace campaign contact Kristi Birkeland at 360-733-8670. For more information or to make your donation to United Way of Whatcom County, go online at unitedwaywhatcom.org

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