

News Release 2014

March 13, 2014

For more information, contact:

Peter Theisen, United Way of Whatcom County, ptheisen@unitedwaywhatcom.org, (360)733-8670

Tamara Tregoning, United Way of Whatcom County, ttregoning@unitedwaywhatcom.org, (360)733-8670

UNITED WAY HONORS LOCAL BUSINESSES, SPOTLIGHTS LIVES CHANGED

Bellingham— With ten different categories of awards and a special spotlight on individuals whose lives have been changed through United Way's work, the annual awards banquet was an exceptional time to honor a variety of community partners and celebrate success. The United Way of Whatcom County's annual event honors the individuals and organizations that made the Fall 2014 Workplace Giving Campaign a success and celebrates the impacts that will be made in the community due to their efforts. The annual event was held at the Silver Reef Event Center on March 12th and highlighted people and organizations that are determined to make a difference in our community and it also provided a glimpse in to the lives of those helped by their support.

Throughout the evening local non-profit leaders shared inspirational stories of individuals whose lives were changed thanks to support from United Way of Whatcom County. Karen Ekdahl, Executive Director for Bellingham Childcare & Learning Center, gave the crowd a glimpse in to the life of a little boy who needed extra support for learning due to his autism. His low-income family was able to get the help they needed and he was able to enter school on track and with the necessary skills to ensure success in his educational career. Riannon Bardsley, Executive Director for Northwest Youth Services, shared stories of a struggling youth who was able to get his life back on track finding a job, a home, and self-confidence. Elya Moore, Deputy Director for Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement, painted a picture of the variety of services that came together to ensure that one man with disabilities had access to crucial medical needs as well as job opportunities. His condition is now stable and he is working towards a degree in order to give back to the community that helped him in his time of need.

United Way of Whatcom County honored their top supporters with the Super Star awards, given to the top 3 largest Workplace Giving Campaigns in Whatcom County (in order of largest to smallest): BP Cherry Point Refinery, Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery, and PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center. These three organizations and their generous employees form an amazing foundation of support making up almost one third of the total United Way Campaign here in Whatcom County.

Throughout the evening five individuals and teams were highlighted for their volunteer leadership in coordinating their United Way Workplace Giving Campaigns at their respective employers. These individuals went above and beyond to inspire others to give, advocate, and volunteer. At the end of the evening, Kori Olsen from WTA was honored with the Campaign Coordinator of the Year Award in thanks for her dedication and hard work in surpassing WTA's total giving from last year. Olsen was a new employee at the time and did a remarkable job on a very

successful campaign, engaging fellow co-workers in United Way's work, holding a chili cook-off, and getting people excited and engaged in making a difference.

A special award, The Cornerstone Award, was presented to Whatcom Educational Credit Union (WECU) for their ongoing support in creating strength and stability for United Way and for the community. Not only did WECU have a record breaking United Way campaign, they were also recognized for giving back to the community through their free financial literacy seminars, their Sweat Equity Team that works on volunteer projects for local nonprofits, scholarships to local college-bound students, as well as providing donations to a variety of local causes. WECU even made a fun and light-hearted video showcasing their United Way support throughout the decades.

Samson Rope Technologies was honored with an Inspiration Award for their unique approach to their Campaign by engaging employees, having them share their stories of how a United Way-funded program personally changed their lives. The Community Partner Award was presented to Washington Federal for their unique support of the Campaign as well as providing a generous donation of office rental space on the top floor of their Cornwall branch building.

The most prestigious award of the night, The Joseph and Anne McClain award, was presented to the company whose level of support was exceptional and whose campaigns inspired others to the highest levels. This year Mills Electric was honored with the Joseph and Anne McClain award for doubling their Campaign both in dollars and in number of donors. Their supportive leadership and dedication to the community made this feat of generosity possible.

After awards were handed out, President/CEO of United Way of Whatcom County, Peter Theisen, spoke about the interconnected nature of Education, Income, and Health and how we all benefit from success in these areas.

"No one program can do it alone, it takes all of us and a variety of solutions and strategies working together to solve these crucial community-wide issues. United Way is in a strong position to continue to work towards ensuring that all children have access to early learning, all families have a safe place to sleep at night, and that everyone has access to the crucial medical care that they need," said Theisen, "Together through the generosity of our local supporters we can make our vision of a stronger community a reality."

The Workplace Giving Campaign is made possible through the Community Builder Program, which allows companies to sponsor the Campaign through monetary donations or loaning a staff member to participate in the Loaned Executive Professional Development Program. This year there were four individuals loaned and one sponsored. All of them participated in an in-depth training that included improving public speaking, learning about the issues facing our community, improved time management skills, and a variety of other important professional skills. They were then tasked with working with 25-35 local businesses and organizations to support their workplace campaign efforts. The five participants in the program all expressed a renewed understanding of the community as well as an increase in professional skills to bring back to their workplaces. Community Builder Participants included: Samson Rope Technologies, BP Cherry Point Refinery, Anvil Corporation, Matrix Service, Inc., PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center, WECU, Boeing Corporation, CH2M HILL, PowerTek Electric, and Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery.

The approximately \$1.8 million raised by this effort will be used to support solutions for current issues affecting our community in the areas of Education, Income, and Health. A team of local volunteers will review programs and conduct site visits in order to grant funds to make progress on goals in Education, Income, and Health. Funds are granted by teams of community volunteers based on current issues, relevancy of the program within the community, and ability to use best practices to help achieve specific community-wide goals. Those interested in participating on the committee are encouraged to contact United Way of Whatcom County.

About United Way of Whatcom County

United Way of Whatcom County's mission is to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of our communities to advance the common good through Education, Income, and Health. They provide leadership that galvanizes and connects a diverse set of individuals and institutions, and mobilize human and financial resources, to create long-term social change by advancing Education, Income, and Health for all. United Way of Whatcom County's goals for the community involve: helping children/youth achieve their potential through academic success, ensuring individuals/families achieve financial stability and economic independence, and building individuals who are healthy and avoid risky behaviors. 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>

###