

News Release 2011

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UNITED WAY OF WHATCOM COUNTY KICKS OFF ITS FALL 2011 CAMPAIGN WITH A SPECIAL EFFORT TO BOOST EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY

Bellingham--United Way of Whatcom County kicked off its Fall 2011 Campaign on Thursday, Sept. 8 with a sold-out luncheon and a message about the importance of Education, Income and Health in our community.

Held at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal, the luncheon brought 235 community members, partner agencies, and sponsors together to celebrate the beginning of the 2011 Campaign, an effort that raises funds that support 40+ programs that seek to eliminate hunger, provide access to crucial medical needs, build skills for maintaining stable income, reduce domestic abuse, provide constructive outlets for teens, and much more. United Way of Whatcom County unveiled that they are taking a leadership role in supporting early learning to help ensure strength and stability in future generations.

The event was made possible in thanks to contributions from Anvil Corp, ConocoPhillips, IBEW Local 191, Portionables, Puget Sound Energy, US Bank The Unity Group, Windows on the Bay Events, Courtyard Gardens, and Lithtex NW.

United Way of Whatcom County President, Peter Theisen, thanked and congratulated the crowd on raising an impressive amount of \$2 million last year, an amount that allowed United Way to invest in local programs that touched over 150,000+ Whatcom County residents. He also shared some key findings from the 2011 Whatcom Prosperity Project, a survey of 37,000+ Whatcom County residents living in poverty: 70% of residents relying on assisted housing are not high school graduates and only a quarter of high school graduates can afford health care.

Keynote speaker Dr. Greg Baker, commended United Way of Whatcom County's focus on education, and reminded the audience of the importance of investing in children. He was candid about financial inequalities that he sees in the Bellingham school district, but also shared that the district is working towards equality and hopes to ensure that the same opportunities are open to all students no matter their economic status.

Wrapping up the afternoon, Dr. Eileen Coughlin, United Way Board of Directors and Western Washington University Vice President for Student Affairs and Academic Support Services, injected enthusiasm with a

powerful message that focused on the triumph of the human spirit. “These are the worst of times”, Coughlin said, “but also the best of times. Some of us might have less, but if we look around, we will see that others have nothing, and stepping up our charitable contributions to be part of positive change is a powerful way to make a difference for us all.”

The 2011 campaign will be placing an extra emphasis on early childhood literacy. Speaking about the effort, Theisen explained that education experts believe a child’s success in school depends on his or her ability to read, making early childhood literacy a crucial component to success later in life.

“We are aware that literacy is the most important skill early on in life,” Theisen said. “That skill contributes to an individual’s success in all aspects of life and helps make him or her a productive member of society.”

Over the next year United Way of Whatcom County will be inviting proposals from organizations and community members for a collaborative approach to work towards community solutions in the area of early childhood literacy.

The 2011 Campaign effort is made possible by a group of local sponsors that contributed \$90,000 to ensure that more of the dollars raised during the Campaign will be spent on crucial programs. Sponsors include BP, Matrix Services, Inc., Whatcom Educational Credit Union, Samson Rope, Banner Bank, PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center, Boeing, Bellingham Cold Storage, Portionables, CH2MHill, ConocoPhillips and Puget Sound Energy.

The Campaign will take place at hundreds of local organizations and offers community members the chance to contribute an annual pledge that supports a safety net of a variety of services in Whatcom County. If your organization would like to participate please contact Richard Emerson, United Way of Whatcom County Campaign Director, at 733-8670.

United Way of Whatcom County Board Chair, Scott Corzine, announced the 2011 Campaign goal is to raise \$2.1 million to help ensure that basic needs are taken care of as well as fund new efforts to support early learning.

“With many organizations beginning their United Way efforts early this year, we are encouraged by the spirit of giving and the drive to make a difference,” said Theisen, “Though the economic situation might pose challenges, we believe our community will step up, participate, and join in the effort to create positive change.”

United Way of Whatcom County has worked for over 50 years to increase financial resources for local health and human service needs, and to seek and invest in community-building opportunities to improve the health and welfare of Whatcom County residents.