

## News Release 2012

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **UNITED WAY KICKS-OFF 2012 CAMPAIGN, FOCUSES ON ADVANCING EDUCATION INCOME AND HEALTH FOR ALL**

Bellingham—United Way of Whatcom County officially began its 2012 campaign on Thursday, September 6th with a kick-off luncheon that called the community into action. The luncheon, which took place at the Bellingham Cruise terminal, had over 230 attendees and presenters that focused on the unique issues affecting Whatcom County in the areas of Education, Income, and Health.

Scott Corzine, United Way of Whatcom County Board Chair, welcomed everybody and was followed by the 2012 Campaign Chair Marjorie Hatter, Refinery Manager for Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery.

Greg Winter, Executive Director of the Whatcom County Homeless Service Center, presented information about the status of income stability and housing in Whatcom County. “Studies show that stable and affordable housing relates directly to a child’s success in education,” Winter explained. “Thanks to organizations like United Way, we are increasing the awareness and support of the importance of safe and stable housing for all.”

Linda Quinn, Super Intendant for the Ferndale School District, explained that when it comes to improving education in our community, “early learning is the biggest bang for the buck.” Students who are not reading proficiently by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school which may lead to delinquency, homelessness, under skilled employees, and strain on taxpayer dollars. The Early Literacy Program in the Ferndale School district is just one initiative that has come from United Way of Whatcom County’s focus on impacting education and graduation rates in our community.

There are more than 25,000 families living without health insurance in Whatcom County. Chris Phillips, Director of Community Affairs for Peace Health St. Joseph Medical Center, enlightened the audience on the increasing rates of drug use in Whatcom County, and the effect “school readiness, income stability, and the health of children” will have on our community now and in the future. He also mentioned with the high amount of uninsured individuals, that means more use of the Emergency Room and an increased strain on tight local dollars.

With information from experts such as the aforementioned individuals, United Way of Whatcom County has chosen to focus on improving Education, Income, and Health to build a stronger community for all. With specific goals in each of those three areas, this year's Campaign Goal of \$2.2 million will be invested to improve graduation rates, increase access to learning opportunities, increase financial stability, increase independence for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities, and reduce child abuse and domestic violence.

"We are here today to seize an opportunity. That opportunity is to raise \$2.2 million dollars. That is \$11 dollars per person in Whatcom County per year" campaign chair Marjorie Hatter said. "Instead of buying a cappuccino every morning we can buy hope and build a better community for all."

Peter Theisen, President of United Way of Whatcom County, is looking forward to another successful campaign with strong participation from companies and individual contributors alike. Theisen said that 75% of Whatcom County's population is served annually by United Way of Whatcom County funded programs but that we are all affected by these positive results, "We all have a stake in the collective wellbeing of our community because we are all interconnected, we all benefit from a child succeeding in school, from a family achieving financial stability, and for the improved health of all Whatcom County residents," said Theisen.

Community members left with new enthusiasm and words of inspiration from the speakers resonating with them. As Marjorie Hatter so simply stated, "I hope when I look back on my life I can say that I lived united."

The event was made possible thanks to contributions from the 2012 Community Builder Sponsors (organizations that sponsor the 2012 Campaign): Banner Bank, BP Cherry Point Refinery, Matrix Service Inc., Peace Health St. Joseph Medical Center, Whatcom Educational Credit Union, Boeing Corporation, CH2M Hill, Samson Rope, Sargento Foods Inc., Williams Company, Bellingham Cold Storage, Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery, and Puget Sound Energy. Additional support was provided by table sponsors: Anvil Corp., Bellingham Cold Storage, North Coast Credit Union, Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery, PowerTek Electric, Puget Sound Energy, Sargento Foods Inc., The Unity Group, US Bank, and the Whatcom Family YMCA. In-kind support included generous donations from Windows on the Bay/Hilltop Catering, Lithtex NW, and Courtyard Gardens.

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](http://www.unitedwaywhatcom.org) or check out their Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/UnitedWayWhatcom>

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