

Looking on the inside to find those in need

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When we look around Larimer County, it's hard to imagine that there are people struggling. I don't mean having to cutback on their living expenses in these tough economic times, I mean people who are working multiple jobs, year after year, and still not able to make rent and who must rely on a local nonprofit for food and other services each month. It's especially difficult to see the poverty and people in need that exists in Estes Park. After all, Estes Park was recently voted "Best Vacation Spot." Last year it was named "Best Family Friendly Vacation Spot" by The Weather Channel. From the outside, Estes appears perfect.

Did you know there are people in Estes Park who work three jobs during the summer to make sure they can survive through the winter months? It's a fact, and one that cannot be ignored. The Estes Park community is gracious and continually gives back. Unfortunately the need is greater than ever.

I looked up the definition of community. It's defined as "a group of people who live in the same area or a group of people with a common background or with shared interests within society." I truly believe that all Estes Park residents, including seasonal residents, have one shared interest: To preserve the quality of life of the Estes Park community.

One of the ways to preserve such a wonderful community is to support your nonprofit organizations. Did you know there are dozens of nonprofits serving people in need in Estes Park? United Way of Larimer County supports several of these nonprofits. This year there is an increased need. We've developed a fundraising campaign to specifically benefit six Estes Park nonprofit agencies. The fundraiser started on July 15th and will run through Sept. 15, 2009. This is in addition to what United Way annually contributes to other agencies and programs in Estes.

When you go to the store, your favorite restaurant, or when friends come to town and visit the many tourist attractions unique to Estes Park, the person serving you could be someone who needs a hand up. It could be your neighbor, a friend who is too embarrassed to tell you they rely on the nonprofit community to help them get by each month.

I recently talked with one of our United Way donors, Rachel Durham, and discovered in a short conversation that she was once someone in need and United Way of Larimer County supported the programs that helped her and her daughters get back on their feet. Rachel said if there was one thing she could share with others about United Way it would be this: "You may not see the difference you're making but you're changing lives in a positive way; even saving lives. I know it definitely changed and saved mine."

The people in need in the Estes community need you now. You may not see them and it may not be obvious that poverty lives in this majestic valley. Poverty is an economic issue and impacts the quality of life for all. Now is the time to think about that shared interest: Preserving the quality of life in Estes Park. Whether you reside in Estes year-round or seasonally, you are part of this community. Your support is needed and appreciated more than you know. Perhaps we can have a new shared community interest: Live here. Give here.