

Recession doesn't stop community from giving United Way collected \$7.5M this year

SARAH JANE KYLE • SARAHKYLE@COLORADOAN.COM • JUNE 18, 2010 • FORT COLLINS COLORADOAN

Despite the economic challenges of the past year, United Way of Larimer County announced Friday that it saw a 2 percent increase in donations and collected \$7.5 million in its annual fundraising campaign scheduled to end this month.

While the money came from various sources, such as grants, individual donations and leverage dollars, \$5.4 million came from workplace giving, said Pam Davis, vice president of marketing and communications.

"We are fortunate that the wonderful businesses in our community allow us to come in and speak to employees and talk about United Way and ways that they can give back to the community," Davis said. "They can do that through payroll deductions. That makes it very, very easy for folks to give."

Although many workers likely were dealing with wage freezes, pay cuts or reductions in hours, they still chose to donate because they saw the need for help firsthand through friends, neighbors and perhaps even themselves, Davis said.

"Many of them actually knew someone who was in need for the first time in their lives," Davis said. "They understood; they knew somebody, and they stepped up. They wanted to help."

Donations to United Way go to three primary purposes, Davis said: basic and emergency needs, long-term sustainable change (self-sufficiency) and the Community Impact Fund, which supports the majority of the organization's projects.

Because of a corporate partnership known as the Cornerstone Program, Davis said donors can rest easy knowing that 100 percent of individual contributions go directly to helping the community.

AnnMarie Arbo, who works with the Loveland-Berthoud Interface Hospitality Network (better known as the Angel House), a partner of United Way of Larimer County, said that, while times are tough, it is important to realize that the economic hardships increase the community's needs. Arbo said Angel House and other United

Way partners depend on the organization's funding to operate.

"Everybody's in hardship, but there's always somebody in worse hardship than you," Arbo said. "I think people are listening to that, and they're paying attention to that. United Way does such a good way with making sure that everybody understands that."

With continued support and donations from United Way and the community, Arbo said the organization hopes to eventually help residents in Fort Collins as well as in Berthoud and Loveland.

While many are unable to give financially because of the economy, Davis added that the increase in fundraising has been accompanied by an increase in volunteerism.

"Volunteerism is a way for people who perhaps cannot afford to give monetarily to give back to the community," Davis said. "What you find when you talk to anybody that volunteers is that it feels good to help other people."

Volunteers are essential to nonprofits, Davis said, with many performing duties that would otherwise require a paid employee. By volunteering, community members are able to ensure that more funding goes to helping the Larimer County community.

"They do jobs and they contribute things that would need to get done by the nonprofit anyway and they do that out of the goodness of their heart, not because someone's paying them," Davis said. "What they can give back in a couple of hours makes a huge impact on the people in our community and on the nonprofits that serve our community."

Whether by volunteerism or donations, Davis said she has seen firsthand the beauty and heart of the community and hopes to see continued increases in both areas as the year continues.

"We believe that people can give back in many, many ways; of their time, of their talent and of monetary value as well," Davis said. "There is no amount that is too small to make a difference."