

The view from here: Giving spirit is no joke in city, county

BY KIM ROEGNER-WILSON • THE VIEW FROM HERE • JUNE 13, 2010 • FORT COLLINS COLORADOAN

If you really want to know what's at the heart of the character of a community, examine the spirit of giving that exists there.

At this year's United Way of Larimer County State of the Community address, the spirit and character of our community really showed through. In a room full of more than 600 community partners, important topics such as homelessness prevention, community well-being and the importance of volunteering were all discussed.

But it was when Gordan Thibedeau, president and CEO of United Way of Larimer County spoke of the 38 percent of our community residents who volunteer that it became clear why the vision that was spelled out at this lunch would be, could be, possible to accomplish here. Right here, in our city.

And what became most apparent was this: Volunteer-ing here is not a feel-good slogan, it is a way of life.

I want to say it again. The percentage of people who volunteer in our community is a whopping 38 percent. This significantly outpaces the volunteer rate of both the state and the nation. In fact, we can boast the seventh-best volunteer rate in the nation for a community our size.

Perhaps this level of time-giving generosity should not come as a surprise.

After all, United Way of Larimer County recently earned USA Weekend's Make A Difference Day award largely because of the high numbers of individuals who turned out, more than 4,500 in all, to volunteer their time to make our community a better place.

Without these volunteers, so many of the programs talked about at United Way of Larimer County's State of the Community address, both current programs and future strategies to improve our community, would simply not be possible.

I am proud to live in a community where standing up for the most vulnerable is a way of life, and where standing together as a unified whole in protection of those who cannot protect themselves is an action, not a slogan.

If you are interested in being a part of the community of volunteers, here are a couple of great places to go to get further information about volunteer opportunities in our region. First is United Way of Larimer County's annual Volunteer Resource Guide, which is available at The Coloradoan, 1300 Riverside Ave., and at United Way, 424 Pine St., Suite 102. Volunteer

opportunities are also posted year-round on United Way's website at www.uwaylc.org. Simply follow the "volunteer" link to learn more.

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