

## United Way touts volunteers' dedication, leadership

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LOVELAND — The United Way of Larimer County honored community volunteers Thursday, citing their leadership and commitment, but cautioned more collaborative work is needed to help area residents.

"It's not enough to keep things from getting worse," Gordan Thibedeau, president and CEO of the United Way of Larimer County, told about 500 business, community and civic leaders at The Ranch.

Honored were:

- > Barbara Nuss, a longtime senior volunteer from Loveland who died in October
- > Vicki Pitmon, a volunteer with Alternatives to Violence, a Loveland-based shelter organization that helps battered women
- > A-Train Marketing Communications, a Fort Collins-based marketing company
- > Elizabeth Vandesande, a youth volunteer from Loveland
- > Darcy McClure, a Loveland city worker who works on community development issues

Many of the speakers at Thursday's event reflected on the state of the economy. Thibedeau noted that despite an economy that's put thousands of people out of work locally, United Way saw giving to its annual campaign rise 6 percent.

United Way is leading an effort called Pathways Past Poverty, which aims to understand the causes of poverty in Larimer County, and to help find solutions. The nonprofit also is working toward a "housing first" model of helping the homeless by getting them permanent housing first, then addressing the root causes of their homelessness, including drug and alcohol abuse.

Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien was the featured speaker at Thursday's banquet, and she focused on the connections between health care, child care, poverty, education and success. O'Brien said she thinks nonprofits need to do a better job collaborating to tackle big issues.

O'Brien, former director of the Colorado Children's Campaign, said there's strong evidence showing that parents who have access to good child care are better employees who raise smarter, healthier kids who go on to live successful healthy lives themselves.

"It's a whole lot cheaper to intervene early. The longer you wait ... the more expensive it's going to be," O'Brien said. "It's just more efficient to get kids a good start early on."

She added: "We have to find a way to knit these things together for everyone."

O'Brien said she and Gov. Bill Ritter are also working to revamp the CSAP tests so they offer more "diagnostic" solutions, rather than simply measuring what kids know. O'Brien said the state is also working to help get high school graduates into community college or university because so many jobs now require technical ability.

"We have globally competitive standards we are shooting for," O'Brien said.



Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien speaks about poverty in Colorado during the United Way of Larimer County State of the Community Event on Thursday at the First National Bank Exhibition Hall at The Ranch in Loveland. (Miranda Grubbs/The Coloradoan)