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For Immediate Release



United Ways Approve Merger

Leawood Mayor Peggy Dunn to Chair new United Way

(Greater Kansas City)---It's something donors, volunteers and community partners have suggested for years. A single United Way organization to identify significant community issues, develop solutions to the challenges we face and to garner and invest resources to make a difference in people's lives and the community. Over the last five days, United Way donors overwhelmingly voted to approve the merger of three Kansas City area United Ways into one organization, to be known as United Way of Greater Kansas City (UWGKC).

The United Way of Greater Kansas City (UWGKC) will combine volunteers, staffs and other assets of Bi-County United Way of Cass and Jackson, Heart of America United Way (including its affiliate Northland United Way Services) and United Way of Johnson County. As a result of this action, UWGKC will become the largest charitable organization in the Greater Kansas City area. Last year those four organizations raised \$36.25 million of the total \$38.5 million raised by United Way raised in our community.

The respective boards of the participating Kansas City area United Ways recommended the merger and selected Leawood, Ks. Mayor Peggy Dunn, a well-regarded community leader, to become UWGKC's first board chair. Dunn says she is honored to serve in this important, historic role and says she agreed to do so because, "I believe a metro-wide United Way is a critical tool as we work to strengthen our community." Dunn added, "Combining the resources, skills, knowledge and energy of these United Ways will help us better assess and address community needs and issues that cut across geographic boundaries. It will allow United Way to pursue strategies that not only address immediate needs, but also get to the heart of the issue by tackling the underlying cause of a given issue."

The existing United Way offices in Independence, the Northland, Lenexa, and downtown Kansas City will continue to operate as a part of UWGKC's commitment to stay connected to donors, volunteers and service agencies as well as maintain insight into local community issues. Each office will have a local operating board made up of volunteer leaders who will work to execute UWGKC's plan to impact the community. Local operating boards will also manage the relationship with funded agencies and forge other partnerships to address needs and support fundraising. The "eyes and ears" of the UWGKC in their respective communities, local operating boards will also set local impact plans and make local funding recommendations in line with the community-wide priorities set by the UWGKC board.

UWGKC will be governed by a board of trustees that reflects the racial, ethnic, gender, geographic and organizational diversity of the Greater Kansas City area. The board will be made up of representatives appointed by the participating United Ways, at-large members, the campaign chair and labor co-chair, representatives of organized labor and representatives of direct service agencies. The Wyandotte County United Way withdrew from the planning process when a three-year agreement among the United Ways ended in April, 2006. To promote collaboration and open dialogue, a board seat will also be offered to the United Way of Wyandotte County. The UWGKC is committed to investing resources in Wyandotte County to ensure that health and human service needs are met and will work closely with Wyandotte County WWC on key community initiatives.

Transition will begin immediately with the merger expected to officially take effect in June. In the meantime, Peggy Dunn will serve as Chair of a Transition Board of Trustees that will oversee activities related to the merger including recruitment of the permanent board. Dunn said, "Our goal is to significantly strengthen United Way's presence and performance in the Greater Kansas City region. In doing so, we believe we can dramatically improve the quality of life for individuals, families and the many communities that make up Greater Kansas City. We strongly believe that together, we can address and successfully resolve some of the most difficult health and social challenges we face as a community. We are anxious to begin." Joining Dunn as officers of the Transition Board will be Donald Hall, Jr., President and CEO of Hallmark Cards, Inc., serving as Vice-Chair; and Bridgette Williams, President of Greater Kansas City AFL-CIO, serving as Secretary. The permanent board will be in place by June.

United Way of America (UWA) fully supports the merger as a part of an overall effort by the Kansas City area United Ways to address needs more effectively while also achieving greater efficiency. In fact, Brian Gallagher, UWA's president, visited the area on several occasions and UWA identified and funded a consultant to help develop the merger plan. According to UWA, other communities that have embraced a mission-centered approach and adapted their processes and structures (in some cases consolidating with neighboring United Ways) have received remarkable results both in their impact on the community and their fundraising efforts.

The UWGKC Transition Board also announced that Susan Stanton will serve as the Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Stanton has held senior executive positions in both the public and private sector and has over 20 years of experience in leadership roles in Fortune 500 companies. Stanton is currently providing consulting services to the business and civic community and is an active community volunteer, serving on a number of civic, academic and nonprofit boards. Stanton was the former President and CEO of Payless Cashways, Chief Operating Officer of La Petite Academy, Inc., Vice President of H&R Block, Vice President of Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the former chief administrator of Jackson County, Missouri, overseeing all operating and support departments.

No stranger to United Way, Stanton served as Kansas City area United Way Campaign Co-Chair and Chair of the Heart of America United Way Board in the mid-90s. Stanton will start their new duties immediately. A permanent CEO will likely be named before the end of the year.

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