



United Way Campaign Facing Major Challenge in Wake of Economic Downturn

Volunteers Announce “Live United Day” to Rally Community Support

(Greater Kansas City)----When United Way kicked off its annual fall fundraising campaign there were storm clouds on the economic horizon, but United Way volunteers were hopeful that they would dissipate, not intensify. As we all know, that hasn’t been the case. Seven weeks into the 2008 Kansas City area United Way campaign, leaders say they are moved by the generosity of many donors, but United Way must get more people involved if it hopes to reach its \$40.5 million goal and meet the growing demand for social services in our community.

Addressing reporters at a specially called news conference, United Way campaign co-chairs Peter deSilva and Ed Tervol, Jr. acknowledged the economic uncertainty facing everyone, saying it is having an impact on fundraising efforts. Companies where business is good and employment is steady have done well, raising as much or more money for United Way than they did last year. But other companies that are struggling, where employment is down, are having trouble matching last year’s totals. “Based on results from companies that have already completed their United Way campaigns, we are about \$400,000 short of where we need to be to reach our \$40.5 million goal,” said deSilva. He added, “It doesn’t mean we can’t make up the deficit, but we have our work cut out for us during the last four weeks of the campaign.”

The shortfall comes at a crucial time, when demand for services at the 143 nonprofit agencies funded by United Way in the Kansas City area is exploding. Brent Stewart, President and CEO of United Way of Greater Kansas City says, “The number of calls to United Way 2-1-1 from people seeking help is averaging 2,300 a week. More than 64% of those calls are from people needing financial assistance for basic needs, such as food, utilities or housing.”

Stewart said, “United Way agencies are being overwhelmed by the number of people seeking help, many for the very first time. The agencies’ dedicated professionals are working long hours and stretching their limited resources to help as many people as they can.” He cited several examples of what’s happening:

- Redemptorist Social Services has already provided utility assistance to more than 1,100 clients this year, compared to 854 during all of 2007. That’s a 29% increase with more than two months left in the year.
- Harvesters reports requests for food from area homeless shelters, food banks and group homes are up more than 50% over this time last year. 43% of the clients served are children.
- Community Service League tracks cases where they are unable to meet client requests for help. They call them “Unmet Needs.” Through the end of Sept this year, the dollar value of requests for help they could not meet totaled \$651,890. That’s a 98% increase over the first nine months of 2007.

Campaign co-chair Ed Tervol, Jr. told reporters, “You can see why it is so important that we respond to the challenge we are facing as a community. We still believe we can raise the money we need to meet the increased demand. We know that the good people of Greater Kansas City care about their friends and neighbors. They have responded to economic challenges in the past and I believe they can and will do it again.”

To help draw attention to the challenge facing United Way, Tervol and deSilva announced a special effort designed to get more people involved in the effort to raise money. They are asking organizations and individuals throughout the community to recognize Wednesday, November 12th, as “Live United Day.” On that day United Way is asking employers to allow employees who donate \$5 to United Way the privilege of wearing jeans to work.

For those who already wear jeans at work, deSilva suggested employees put together a chili cook-off, a potluck lunch or ice cream social as a way of raising additional money for United Way, whether they have already run a United Way campaign or not. DeSilva said, “Live United Day is something everyone can participate in whether they work at a big company or a small company. It’s a way for everyone to do a little extra to help the many people in our community who are hurting.” He added, “Based on the number of people who work outside their homes in the Kansas City area we can raise more than \$430,000 if just 10% of the workforce participates in “Live United Day”

Those interested in helping can get more information about Live United Day online at www.unitedwaygkc.org or by calling (816) 559-4648. Tervol said, “If your company doesn’t currently run a United Way campaign, and you are the person who can make it happen, please give United Way a call. The situation we’re facing this year is too critical for people to sit on the sideline. We need to get everyone involved.”

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