

Lake Area United Way
United Way of Porter County
United Way of LaPorte County



Northwest Indiana United Ways Kickoff 2009 Campaign Amid Concerns of Surging Community Needs and the Recession

(Hammond, Indiana) Citing concerns over skyrocketing appeals for help from people affected by the recession, the United Ways that serve Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties have set a 2009 regional campaign goal of at least \$8,100,000.

Aria Mazer, 2009 Co-Chair for the Lake Area United Way, said, "The economy makes this a challenging year for our campaign. So now more than ever, we need everyone to help - for one simple reason: the needs are greater than ever."

"As we thought about our local campaign goals in this very challenging year, we considered two things: the increasing needs in our communities and the commitment we all have to meet them," Mazer said.

In announcing the \$8.1 million minimum target, Mazer said this year's regional goal is \$251,950 less than what was collectively raised last year. "In fact, we know that the region's needs demand more and we hope that we can do better than that," she added.

"When we talked with our individual campaign teams, with business and labor leaders, and individuals from our communities, it became pretty clear that even a flat goal - and certainly an increase versus last year - would be very tough to deliver."

The three regional campaign chairs revealed the goal in a special news conference held at Horseshoe Casino in Hammond. Also participating were: Charles Welter, president of Welter National Bank and 2009 Campaign Co-Chair for the United Way of Porter County; and Mike Charbonneau, manager of communications and public relations at NiSource/NIPSCO and 2009 Campaign Co-Chair for the United Way of LaPorte County.

At the press conference, Welter cited several facts, alarming statistics and trends as reported by the 2-1-1 information and referral call center that the United Ways in Lake and Porter County help to fund as a community initiative through Northwest Indiana Community Action Corporation (NICA):

He pointed out that the current average unemployment rate now stands at 9.2% in Porter County, 10.5% in Lake County, and 11.4% in LaPorte County.

"Calls coming into the 2-1-1 info line for housing assistance including foreclosure, mortgage and rent as well as requests for help with utilities are up 421% over the same time last year. Pleas for food assistance have jumped 275%," Welter said, adding that many callers are first-timers.

Welter cited one other disturbing trend caused by the recession. "We're seeing an up-tick in calls coming from individuals and families that were once on a path toward self-sufficiency who now find themselves sliding backwards," he said.

"I think of our society and our community as like a ladder with the top rung being only as strong as the bottom step. If the bottom snaps, the entire ladder will collapse," Welter explained.

"Fortunately, we live in a region where we have a long tradition of giving back to help others in need," Welter stated. "But as with any endeavor, it is 20% of the people who are doing 80% of the heavy lifting and work. We need to get the remaining 80% engaged in the process."

Mike Charbonneau, 2009 Campaign Co-Chair for the United Way of LaPorte County, agrees. "We recognize and understand the challenges facing businesses and people, but we hope they will see the campaign as a critical time to step up if they are current donors, come back if they haven't given lately, or join the United Way effort for the first time," he said.

"Those of us with jobs, we're the fortunate ones. But sadly there are people who are neighbors who are not as lucky," Charbonneau said.

"If everyone comes forward, we have a real chance of meeting and hopefully exceeding our goal," Charbonneau explained. "We need to do all we can to ensure that United Way and its agencies are there for those in need. That's why everyone's support and participation is so critical."

He said the key to a successful campaign is having all current United Way donors to maintain and hopefully to increase their gifts to help meet the rising tide of community needs. Just as important, he said, are new corporate gifts, new payroll deduction workplace employee

campaigns, new individual donations, and personal leadership gifts of \$1,000 and higher.

"Whether it's a dollar a month, a dollar a week, a dollar a day, or more if you can, we hope that everyone and every business in our communities will give at some level," Charbonneau noted. "We're all in this together. By working and giving together, we will get through these tough times."

This is the third regional campaign for the independent United Ways that serve Northwest Indiana. Officials explained with so many local residents living in one community, but working across county lines and the fact that community issues do not stop at geographic borders, the local chapters came together in 2007 to orchestrate the first regional campaign. Contributions stay in the community in which it is given unless donors designate their gift to go back to their home county or elsewhere.

For more information, please call or visit:

Lake Area United Way	(219) 923-2302	www.lauw.org
United Way of Porter County	(219) 464-3583	www.unitedwaypc.org
United Way of LaPorte County	(219) 362-6256	www.unitedwaylpc.org

