

MEDIA RELEASE

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United Way's Day of Caring & Campaign Kick-off

(BLACKHAWK REGION) – At a virtual event held via Zoom, United Way combined key elements from the cancelled LIVE UNITED Celebration which is traditionally held in March and its annual Day of Caring and Campaign Kick-off, always held in the fall.

United Way recognized front line heroes and essential staff for individual and collective efforts to combat COVID-19, touted its role on the Reopen Rock Task Force, summarized United Way response efforts, and implored attendees to donate to the community campaign.

As part of the program, United Way announced its aggressive campaign goal. United Way Blackhawk Region Board Chair, Al Hulick announced, “To meet the needs of many will require our collective efforts. Today, without balloons or confetti we announce a \$2.4 million dollar campaign goal.” Hulick added, “This is not a target, it’s a lifeline. It is our challenge to the Blackhawk Region. One that each of us has to step up to meet. If we fall short, our programs will fall short. If programs fall short, our communities can’t get the help they need.”

United Way Blackhawk Region has also made available an easy to give opportunity by texting “Blackhawk” to 41444.

United Way Blackhawk Region President and CEO Mary Fanning-Penny also shared news during the virtual event about a re-imagining of United Way’s annual Day of Caring. As a safe alternative to traditional volunteer projects, members of the United Way Blackhawk Region Board of Directors will distribute Day of Caring ‘Care Kits’ to nearly 50 nonprofit organizations across the Blackhawk Region following the virtual Campaign Kick-off

“The Care Kits include: protective masks, dry wipes and hand sanitizer, contactless thermometers, sanitizing solutions, gloves, no-touch door openers, and posters in both English and Spanish on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19,” Fanning-Penny said. “And will allow local nonprofits to provide continued care of staff, clientele, families and vulnerable residents.” Fanning-Penny added that the Covid-19 Care Kits were made possible by United Way’s Day of Caring sponsors.

Through the generosity of a sponsor, Alliant Energy, United Way also announced the upcoming installation of the first two Born Learning Trails in the Blackhawk Region. A trail will be installed in Beloit at Turtle Creek Park and also at Bond Park in Janesville. These will be the first of what United Way hopes will be many Born Learning Trails in many communities across the Blackhawk Region.

Beloit City Manager and United Way board member, Lori Curtis Luther, in a recorded message talked about the interactive Born Learning Trails, “which provide a free opportunity for parents, grandparents and caregivers to boost children’s language skills and literacy. The playful design of 10 colorful signs in both English and Spanish, give prompts for simple games that turn an excursion at the park into fun learning for young children.”

Also recognized at the event were award winners for their advocacy and volunteerism.

Homelessness is a complex social problem with a variety of underlying economic and social factors. Tackling a problem as big and all-encompassing as this requires deliberate, strategic and collective actions using the talents of many to affect real change. That is why United Way Blackhawk Region honored FOCUS, an acronym for Finding Opportunities to Collaborate and Unite Services, with this year’s “Excellence in Advocacy” Award. FOCUS is a coalition of private and public serve providers working to identify and resource gaps in programs and services to Janesville’s homeless population.

Janesville City Manager Mark Freitag, spoke on behalf of FOCUS in a recorded message during Thursday’s event. Freitag shared some of the early successes of FOCUS, including identifying a need for securing funding for a Housing and Resource Navigator in Rock County, creating a multi-disciplinary Homeless Outreach Team to connect one-one-one with the homeless in Janesville, initiating an Opportunity Internship Program, working to change the overnight sleeping/parking ordinance in Janesville to accommodate homeless community members temporarily living in their vehicles, and opening hotel space for additional overnight vouchers.

United Way is proud of the thoughtful and purpose-driven advocacy that is the collective force of FOCUS.

Manager of Financial Analysis and Forecasting at ABC Supply Co., inc. and former United Way Blackhawk Region board member, Amy Lokrantz was honored with the Geraldine Hedberg Volunteer of the Year Award.

Fanning-Penny remarked, “Amy Lokrantz does not miss an opportunity to encourage us to continuously improve by sparking innovation, imagination and critical thinking.”

The annual LIVE UNITED Award, presented to a company that displays exceptional support for United Way through its workplace campaign, as well as volunteerism, was presented to First National Bank and Trust Company.

United Way Blackhawk Region Resource Development Director Rick West stated, “In addition to supporting United Way financially, members of the First National Bank and Trust Company team are strong advocates and volunteers of United Way’s mission serving on the board of directors, executive committee, and campaign cabinet.”

Approximately 200 United Way benefactors attended the virtual event, which included a reveal of the 2020 campaign video, award winner acceptance speeches, and more.

To learn more, visit United Way Blackhawk Region's newly redesigned website at LiveUnitedBr.org.

About FOCUS – Recipient of the Excellence in Advocacy Award

Finding Opportunities to Collaborate and Unite Services (FOCUS) is a coalition of private and public service providers in Janesville, working to identify and resource gaps in programs and services provided to our community's homeless population. Facilitated by Janesville's City Manager Mark Freitag, participants include representatives from law enforcement, homeless services specialists, Rock County Human Services, City of Janesville's Housing Services staff, mental health experts, faith organizations, alcohol and other drug treatment program staff and United Way.

About First National Bank and Trust Company – Recipient of the LIVE UNITED Award

First National Bank and Trust Company has been a generous and loyal supporter of United Way. Since United Way Blackhawk Region's unification, the workplace campaign at First National Bank and Trust has grown in dollars pledged by 62%. Year after year, the bank consistently has between 50% and 60% of its employees pledge a gift to United Way Blackhawk Region. In the 2019 Community Campaign, this was the seventh largest campaign in the region based on total dollars pledged. First National Bank and Trust also supports United Way with time and talents as volunteers currently serve on United Way's Board of Directors, Executive Committee and Campaign Cabinet.

About Amy Lokrantz – Recipient of the Geraldine Hedberg Volunteer of the Year Award

As a Manager of Financial Analysis and Forecasting for ABC Supply Co. inc. the breadth and depth of Amy Lokrantz's skill set is remarkable. Lokrantz epitomizes what it means to be a game changer. Time and again, she has proven herself an enthusiastic and reliable hand raiser. At the largest workplace campaign in the region, Lokrantz is a year-round champion for United Way's mission with the ABC Supply Co. team. Lokrantz is also a seasoned participant in United Way's volunteer-driven Community Grant review process, stepping forward to steward donor dollars at every juncture since 2012. In 2018, she successfully completed two, three year terms on United Way's Board of Directors. During her tenure, Lokrantz provided financial expertise in the role of Treasurer for three years, served on the Executive Committee for four years, and remains on the Building and Property Committee.

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To GIVE

Gifts of all sizes are needed to help United Way Blackhawk Region attain its \$2.4 million dollar goal.

- Make a pledge as part of your workplace campaign
- Mail a check to: United Way at 205 N. Main St., Suite 101, Janesville, WI 53545
- Online: LiveUnitedBR.org/GIVE
- Text: BLACKHAWK to 41444

For Help

Dial 211. United Way's 24/7, free and confidential information and referral helpline. Visit LiveUnitedBR.org/211.

To Volunteer

United Way can help you "Get Connected" to local volunteer opportunities and requests for in-kind material donations in the Blackhawk Region. Visit LiveUnitedBR.org/volunteer.

About United Way Blackhawk Region

United Way fights for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in every community. We win by Living United, by forging unlikely partnerships and by finding new solutions to old problems; by mobilizing the best resources; and inspiring individuals to join the fight against a common foe, each community's most daunting social crises. United Way Blackhawk Region Lives United against poverty, family violence, hunger and homelessness to name a few, by providing community grants and resources to 53 human services programs at 29 nonprofit agencies in Rock County, Wis. and northern Winnebago County, Ill. More information is available at LiveUnitedBR.org or engage on social media via [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/UnitedWayBlackhawkRegion), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/UnitedWayBR), [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/united-way-blackhawk-region) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/unitedwayblackhawkregion).

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