11-18-2011

United Way Victory Celebration

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• Good afternoon. We're not quite to our final goal—yet, but this is by no means a premature victory celebration. As is the case every year, we will continue to count pledge cards and donations for the next several weeks. Because I know the calibre of this campus community, I have no doubt that we'll meet and even surpass our goal a bit. We continue to be one of this county's top giving organizations.

• It was an ambitious goal. We asked our campus to continue to stretch itself and reach deeper than ever before. Our goal for 2012 was $300,000—and we're at 94 percent of our goal right now. That was a goal that was $25,000 higher than last year's goal. Our 2010 goal, in turn was $35,000 higher than the 2009 goal. If you do the math, over the past two years, that's an increase of $60,000.

• This campus community, however, continues to rise to the challenge of sustaining those in our community who rely on United Way agencies for assistance. Every dollar given, 88 cents directly supports programs that improve the quality of life in Kalamazoo County.

• It was a stretch for us, and the overall community goal of $9,3 million is a stretch as well. (We're the "point 3" part of that goal). When you think about the economic stresses every family faces, the fact that so many in our communities still find a way to step up and help others is all the more remarkable. I'm so proud to be a part of this region and to be part of a University community that "Lives United" and is so connected with and caring for the community that surrounds it.

• This community is recognized nationally for its United Way outreach. Earlier this fall, the Greater Kalamazoo United Way earned a coveted four-star rating from
Charity Navigator, the nation's leading evaluator for charities. Only a quarter of the nation's charities receive this top rating--so that means our United Way organization outperforms 75 percent of charitable organizations in the U.S. for sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency.

• I want to thank our campaign volunteers for an outstanding job. First of all, Joe Reish did an amazing job. Joe, I don't think any of us would have guessed at the level of commitment you would bring to this role. Last year, I pointed out the "gusto" with which you perform this role I'm at a loss for how to top that term. Thank you.

• And special credit goes to Shannon Landis, WMU’s loaned executive to this year’s campaign. For the past three months, Shannon has somehow managed to juggle two important roles—United Way Campaign Liaison by day, and our University’s director of special events by night. Great job, Shannon.

• All of you who spent time on this effort should take enormous pride in the level of campus participation you sparked. More than 1,200 campus donors have stepped forward to support United Way. We'll keep counting for a few weeks still, so there is still a chance for more to come forward, but as president of this University I could not be more proud of what we've accomplished this fall in terms of raising money for United Way.

• Here's a bit of information about how WMU stepped met the challenge:
  • 1,054 employees made pledges
  • 189 retirees contributed
  • 263 people were first-time contributors
  • 301 of those who gave last year increased their gift this year
  • We had 80 leadership givers who pledged $1,000 or more
  • 16 departments or offices had 100% participation
• Wow. What a statement about this campus community. But just as important is the way this community "gives, advocates, volunteers and lives united."

• Members of this campus community put themselves behind those dollars as well. As I read the roster of agencies and initiatives supported by the United Way, I recognize many in which WMU people invest their time and talent as well.
  • American Red Cross
  • Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Kalamazoo
  • Community Advocates (for persons with developmental disabilities)
  • Constance Brown Hearing Centers
  • Family and Children Services
  • Goodwill Industries
  • Hospice Care of Southwest Michigan
  • MRC Industries
  • Volunteer Center of Greater Kalamazoo
  • The Constance Brown Hearing Center
  • The WMU Center for Disability Services

• These are agencies that we interact with professionally and personally in myriad ways. I doubt very many of us could make it through that list without hearing the name of an initiative or an agency that has a direct impact on our lives or the lives of people we know and care about.

• What you do builds a better life for our families and for our community.

• Maya Angelou once said, "When you learn, teach. When you get, give."

We do both. Thank you.