

Press Release

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United Way’s Spirit of Dutchess County Awards Recognize Volunteer Champions in the Community

POUGHKEEPSIE, NY: United Way of Dutchess County held the 2007 Annual Meeting today with a breakfast for constituents and community supporters at the Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel. Mr. Richard A. Mitchell, Esq., Managing Partner at the firm of Iseman, Cunningham, Riester & Hyde, and Chair of United Way’s Board of Governors, reviewed the numerous accomplishments of United Way’s 2006-07 fiscal year, which concludes on June 30th.

“2006 was truly a milestone year for our United Way”, commented Mr. Mitchell during his address to the Annual Meeting attendees. “We completed the most comprehensive and extensive Community Assessment in our history, and are well poised to continue to make meaningful and lasting impact throughout Dutchess County - helping to advance the common good and create a stronger and healthier community for everyone.”

United Way leadership shared many of the data specifics gathered during the assessment process, and announced that United Way’s efforts moving forward will focus on the three most vital community issue areas as identified in the assessment: Providing Basic Needs, Promoting Financial Stability, and Preparing Young Children for Success.

In addition to summarizing the many achievements of this past year, the 2007 Spirit of Dutchess County Award nominees were recognized and awards presented. Each year United Way of Dutchess County recognizes one adult, one youth and one group who exemplify the very spirit of volunteerism.

2007 adult category award recipients included Mr. Charles Bonsignore, a volunteer with RSVP, and Ms. Susan DeKeukelaere, a volunteer with Dutchess Outreach. The 2007 youth award was presented to Karrah Brennan, whose volunteer efforts with 4H helped raise money for a young victim of leukemia. The 2007 Spirit of Dutchess County group award was presented to Mr. and Mrs. George & Nancy Metz for their work with the Saint Mary’s CYO in Fishkill.

Ms. Dekeukelaere began volunteering with Dutchess Outreach at the Lunch Box; a mid-day meal program. After two years of volunteering for the lunch box, she started volunteering for GIFTS, a meal delivery program for the homebound with HIV/AIDS. She is now the volunteer manager of the Coat Drive, the Post Office Food Drive, helps keep the database updated and designs flyers. She also serves on the Volunteer Committee and the Public Affairs Committee.

Recently, she added public relations to her list of volunteer duties. Despite dealing with a serious illness in 2005, she continued to give more of her time and energy to those in need. She has helped to ensure that those who are hungry are fed and those who need coats are kept warm in the winter. She gives to her community, never asking for anything in return. Her efforts have positively impacted all those served by Dutchess Outreach programs.

Mr. Bonsignore has volunteered with RSVP and other local non-profits for the past eleven and a half years. Mr. Bonsignore began volunteering for several organizations in the Poughkeepsie and Dutchess County area many years ago. On a regular basis Mr. Bonsignore spends time at Eden Park Nursing Home, entertaining the residents with his piano playing skills. At his church, Mr. Bonsignore cooks for the senior's luncheon, assists at devotions with the retired pastor, attends District Council Meetings and works with the Vacation Bible School.

Recently, he started volunteering for the Salvation Army, helping prepare breakfast for between 70 and 90 lower-income families. Over the years, Mr. Bonsignore has accumulated well over 7,000 hours of volunteering in our community. He loves to volunteer and the recipients of his time and talent appreciate his efforts. He is a ray of sunshine, brightening the lives of many Dutchess County residents.

Youth category award recipient Karrah Brennan was recognized for her volunteer work with Cornell Cooperative Extension over the last 4 years. In April 2007, Karrah organized a carnival to raise money for a family of a 9 year old 4-H girl, who is suffering from leukemia. She created flyers and arranged for businesses to donate food and prizes. Karrah attended several 4-H leader committee meetings to ask 4-H leaders to participate with their clubs, by setting up booths for fun games.

Through her efforts the event raised over \$3,500 and all the proceeds were donated to the family. Her enthusiasm and desire to help another 4-H member is admirable. The entire effort was Karrah's idea and her enthusiasm and commitment led to the success of the event.

Mr. and Mrs. George and Nancy Metz received the group category award for their volunteer work with the CYO program at St. Mary's Fishkill. Together, Mr. & Mrs. Metz coordinate and administer the CYO program and lead with hands-on participation of every aspect of their work. Their role includes student enrollment, coaching, officiating at events, providing a safe environment, training and background checks.

The Metz' were already volunteering heavily when they were asked to take over this program and since they started, the program has expanded and improved tremendously. They have provided character and athletic development to children for over 20 years. Their work is so successful because of their quality leadership. Their community spirit is outstanding, and the quality of other volunteers has improved because of their enthusiasm, high spirit and unwavering character as leaders.

Ms. Anne Beaulieu, President & CEO of United Way of Dutchess County, said that the panel of volunteer judges was impressed with the diversity of the nominees this year, and had a very difficult time in selecting recipients for these awards.

In addition to the presentation of the Spirit of Dutchess County Awards, two departing United Way Board of Governors were recognized by Board Chair Mitchell for their service to the community. Dr. Dennis DeLong, former Dean of Marist College and the Honorable Joan A. Pagones, Town of Fishkill Supervisor, were recognized for their outstanding years of service to United Way during their tenures on the Board.

Contributions to the United Way of Dutchess County Community Fund support a portfolio to health and human service programs and initiatives that address three strategic community impact areas -- Providing Basic Needs, Promoting Financial Stability, and Preparing Young Children for Success.

July 13, 2007

The mission at United Way of Dutchess County is to build a stronger, healthier community by raising resources and developing partnerships that make a measurable difference in people's lives. United Way's vision is to be the area's premier community-impact organization and a leader in advancing dialogue on Dutchess County's health and human care issues. Contributors recognize United Way as the best organization for their support because of the measurable results the organization has on the quality of life here in Dutchess County.

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