

A 125-year-old movement

In 1887, a Denver woman, a priest, two ministers and a rabbi recognized the need for cooperative action to address their city's human service needs. This small group put their heads together to plan the first united campaign for 10 nonprofit agencies. They created an organization to serve as an agent to collect funds for local charities, as well as to coordinate relief services, counsel and refer clients to cooperating agencies, and make emergency assistance grants in cases which could not be referred. That year, Denver raised \$21,700 and created a movement that would spread throughout the world to become the United Way system we know today.

More than 125 years after the first United Way was started, the organization is still focused on mobilizing the caring power of communities and making a difference in people's lives. The United Way network is strong with nearly 1,800 community-based United Ways in 40 countries and territories.

The first community fund in Dalton was known as the Empty Stocking Fund and only a few hundred dollars were contributed. In the early 1940s, M.E. Judd bet Lamar Wescott that he couldn't raise \$4,000 — an unheard of sum for a town with a population of 3,000. For the first time, he organized the raising of funds, much like it is today with businesses soliciting their employees. They raised the \$4,000 and he won the bet. The Whitfield Community Chest, now known as the

United Way of Northwest Georgia, was organized in 1952.

A petition for a charter to incorporate the organization was made in 1952, the petitioners being Arthur Richman, R.G. McCamy, W.M. Whiteside, C.W. Moore Jr., S.W. Dendy, L.A. Lee, Ira Nochumson, O.R. Strain, Albert Hodge and Carlton McCamy. The charter was signed Aug. 25, 1952, for a term of 35 years. The goal was \$55,000 for the support of eight agencies.

Almost 65 years and tens of thousands of volunteers later, United Way of Northwest Georgia boasts a campaign goal of \$3.2 million. We have 20 partner agencies that impact local human needs: education, basic needs and health.

Our United Way is a local unit of the largest charity in the United States: United Way Worldwide. United Way of Northwest Georgia is governed by a local board of directors, but we rely on more than 250 volunteers on the board of directors, committees and panels to fulfill our mission annually.

United Way of Northwest Georgia excels on many fronts. The Metro 3 designation is for United Ways that raise between \$2 million and \$4 million annually. Top rankings for United Way of Northwest Georgia when measured against the 115 other Metro 3 United Ways include:

■ 9th: The rank of United Way of Northwest Georgia on dollars raised per person employed; top 93 percent.

■ 8th: The rank of United Way of Northwest Georgia in corporate giving; top 93.9 percent.

■ 4th: The rank of United Way of Northwest Georgia in major gift (\$10,000-plus gifts); top 97.4 percent. One thing for sure is that people

who have made their living in Northwest Georgia have invested their money back into the local community. Our United Way is No. 1 in Georgia in major giving. We boast 24.1 percent of the campaign from a combination of leadership, \$1,000-plus donors and Alexis de Tocqueville members (\$10,000-plus donors).

Our organization has evolved from a force in fundraising to a community solutions provider — connecting individuals to assistance through the 211 help line, coordinating holiday assistance for the needy, deploying more than 3,500 volunteers through the Volunteer Center, training and connecting volunteers to nonprofit boards of directors, and promoting community leadership and philanthropy through giving societies.

Please join Kevin Sanders, vice president of Shaw Hospitality Group and the 2012 United Way of Northwest Georgia campaign chairman, and the United Way Campaign Cabinet in celebrating the beginning of the community-wide United Way campaign at the trade center on Sept. 11 at 11:30 a.m. We will celebrate past successes and look forward to the future. Sanders will announce this year's campaign goal, people impacted by United Way will share their story, and early pacesetter campaigns will be recognized. The \$10 fee will cover the cost of lunch.

We invite you to join the movement. To connect with United Way of Northwest Georgia you can visit our office at 816 S. Thornton Ave. in Dalton or visit our website at ourunitway.org.

Amanda Burt is the president of the United Way of Northwest Georgia.



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Burt**