

UNITED WAY OF NORTHWEST GEORGIA

Spring is the time to lend a hand

With the daffodils blooming, I am reminded of just how refreshing spring is. This winter we have endured snow and treacherous roads. Plans had to be adjusted. Much the same, the past two years have caused consumers to modify their grocery lists, thermostats, and health care budgets.

While some economists think the national economy is looking a bit better, we here in the flooring capital of the world have to ask when we will see some relief. Perhaps we all have adjusted to a new normal. Our local families are still feeling the bite of the recession, and once again, rising fuel prices.

In the past two years, United Way of Northwest Georgia's 80 fund distribution volunteers have shifted funding to basic needs — helping more families remain in their homes, keeping up with their utility bills and providing meals for hungry children. Thousands of families have been helped because of the generosity of each person who answered the call to help their neighbors and gave what they could to United Way.

United Way and our partner agencies have all tightened their belts, and I continue to be amazed by how dedicated our nonprofit agencies are in the face of more clients lining up for services and less funding with which to work.

I am excited to announce that the 2010 United Way campaign raised \$3.3 million in pledges, an increase over the \$3.2 million in pledges last year. We set a stretch campaign goal last fall of \$3.6 million. The stretch goal was not met, but Rhett Orr and his campaign team were certainly successful in their goal to raise awareness of the tremendous need. We raised \$100,000 more than last year, and given the economic environment, this is a community success worth celebrating.

If the fall season is the season when we all think of giving of our financial resources to help others, I challenge us to think of spring as a time to renew our commitment to help others through vol-

unteerism. If the warmer weather has you craving to get outside, learn a new skill, or meet new people, choose from several volunteer projects on the calendar.

The American Red Cross in Murray County, a United Way partner agency, will be hosting Community One-Day Cafe on Saturday, March 26, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Volunteers are needed to assist with food preparation, serving or delivering meals, and clean-up. The Community One-Day Cafe will offer a cafe-like atmosphere for walk-ins or will deliver meals to homebound individuals.

Spring Into volunteerism with Dalton State College on April 9 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Volunteers are needed to assist with planting organic gardens, campus beautification and cleanup, as well as installing an irrigation system for the gardens.

LIVE UNITED With Nature, an event hosted by the United Way Volunteer Center, will be April 16 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Murray County Enrollment Center/Pre-K.

Volunteers are needed to assemble raised garden beds, plant decorative bushes, and assemble bat houses and bird feeders.

The GreenHouse, a child advocacy center, will be hosting a playground cleanup on April 23 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Volunteers are needed to clean, paint, weed flower beds and plant flowers.

Interested volunteers can register at ourunitedway.org or on our Facebook page for any of these projects.

Lastly, we hope you will join us at the United Way Annual Meeting on Tuesday, March 22, at 8:30 a.m. at Ryman Hall. The Connie Woodward Award for Volunteerism in Whitfield County, the Elaine Butler Award for Volunteerism in Murray County, and several Presidential Volunteer Service Awards will be presented. Come and learn more about how your 2010 investment in United Way has helped thousands of your neighbors and friends and see how we are all helping each other by living united.

Amanda Burt is president of United Way of Northwest Georgia.



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