

At the United Way, Community Matters

By *MICHAEL B. KATZ, Esq.*

It's called the Day of Caring, and the name says it all.

The program was started in 1994 by the United Way of Pioneer Valley to involve area businesses and their employees in initiatives that would benefit the community and those who live, work, and play here in Western Mass. It started small, with only 12 companies and fewer than 80 employees. On Sept. 7, 1,700 employees representing 48 companies completed 209 projects in the latest Day of Caring.

Most of these projects were small in nature — spreading mulch in playgrounds, cleaning graffiti from park equipment, sweeping up litter, fixing bicycles, painting fences, for example — but together, they made a difference in the quality of life for many people.

This, in a broader sense, is how the United Way of Pioneer Valley works. It coordinates a number of programs and partners with dozens of area agencies and service providers to make a difference in the lives of more than 100,000 area residents, and

make the Pioneer Valley an attractive place in which to live and work.

The United Way of Pioneer Valley plays a unique leadership role. It identifies specific community issues, coordinates the necessary resources to address those needs, and then follows up to measure the results of its funded programs.

The United Way and its board of directors are doing things in new ways — being conveners, enablers, and facilitators, all to address our community's ongoing and ever-changing needs. The United Way strives to be proactive, not reactive, and to address needs before they become a crisis. It approaches old problems in new ways — its food and shelter programs do not just provide hot meals for the homeless, but encourage services that also provide a welcoming and safe haven, teach job skills, provide vocational training, help arrange job placement, as well as coordinate child care and transportation needs.

Other supported programs

focus on areas dealing with children and young adults, the elderly, families, and health and wellness.

Many people think the United Way benefits and serves others, but not them or their families; they're wrong. By connecting community resources to community needs, the United Way helps make the Pioneer Valley the type of place where you, your family, your employees, and your co-workers will want to live and thrive. Its involvement and impact on quality of life in the region makes it easier to recruit and retain good employees, and to increase your own property values.

It makes our community a place where our children will want to live and raise their own families, rather than heading to someplace where they believe the grass is greener.

As the Day of Caring shows, when people work together, they can make a difference — and at the United Way, we prove this 365 days a year. As this year's United Way campaign kicks off, I

see another opportunity for the people of this region to show what they can do — together.

They can show that community matters and that the United Way is a worthy investment for us and our community.

None of us can predict what personal problem or natural disaster will face us, our neighbors, and co-workers, but we can rest assured knowing the United Way and its affiliated agencies will be there with solutions when situations arise, funding the human services needs of the Pioneer Valley with integrity and innovation. For all of these reasons, I ask that you give generously and support the United Way campaign this year.

For less than the price of a cup of coffee each week, you can make a meaningful impact. Do it for your community, and do it for yourself. ☺

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