

Year in Review

Curt Sandberg, United Way Board Chair



United Way of Grand Forks
East Grand Forks & Area



Give, Advocate, Volunteer. These are the words that represent the essence of what United Way is all about in our community. We ask people to *give* to help families in their time of need. In addition to running a community-wide fund raising campaign, United Way *advocates* for the support of the nonprofit sector which is such a vital part of any community. And, *volunteers* are the backbone of our organization as they not only raise the funds, but also make the important (and at times almost impossible) decisions of how to allocate the funds to our Participating Partner Agencies.

It has been an honor for me to serve as Board Chair for this past year I want to thank contributors, company volunteers, campaign volunteers, Campaign Cabinet members, my fellow board members, and our dedicated, professional United Way staff - all of whom have made this an outstanding year for our organization.

As I look back to January 2009, I recall that one could see it as the glass being *half empty*. Our economy was certainly suffering and this had an effect on the previous fall's campaign. While locally, our community was not suffering as much as others, United Way and our Participating Partner Agencies certainly saw an increase in the health and human service needs of residents, our neighbors.

At the Board's Annual Retreat in May, we discussed at length how to best meet the growing community needs. We questioned whether United Way dollars were really making an impact on the lives of our residents. For the past three years United Way had earmarked \$50,000 to \$65,000 for special *Impact Grants*. Were we just putting bandages on major problems? Could we make an *Impact*?

The outcome of that retreat has resulted in a major shift in how our United Way will operate in the future. We decided to place the *majority* of the funds raised into Impact Grants. These grants would also be available to any local community agency that addressed the targeted issues that United Way had identified as getting in the way of our residents having a good life – one that had a quality education which leads to a stable job with enough income to support the family through retirement, and good health along with healthy relationships.

As the campaign time rolled around, our Marketing Committee, chaired by Laura Endres decided that United Way needed to kick-off our new Community Impact way of doing things by protesting! She and fellow board member Pete Haga organized a Positive

Protest throughout the day at three highly visible sites throughout the city, complete with picket signs – EDUCATION, HEALTH, INCOME! It certainly created a buzz and you can see some of those pictures in the Photo Album tab of this report.

During the fall fund raising campaign we advocated that one should **LIVE UNITED**, and our campaign volunteers worked to raise funds to advance the common good by targeting those building blocks of Education, Income and Health. I am pleased to report that our first campaign under our new Community Impact model has been successful. We saw a modest increase in contributions over last year; even with a questionable economy.

In addition to our regular fund raising activities, fall is a time for United Way to collect Undies! This program began under Marijo Deitz's term as Board Chair and it has really grown. For three weeks in October we ask the community to donate new underwear, diapers and personal care items. They are collected mainly at area churches; hence the official name of the program is *Undies Sundays*. 10,361 items were collected this year, a 53% increase over last year! Thanks to Margaret Reed and Altru's Professional Nursing Committee, everything was counted and sorted in about three hours! Most importantly though is that the items were all distributed in just two days to caseworkers who pickup items for their families.

However throughout the fall at our board meetings, we realized that United Way could be forever funding problems, but if we wanted to make a difference and do more than just put bandages on things, we needed to get to the root cause of the problems. We needed to make an *Impact*.

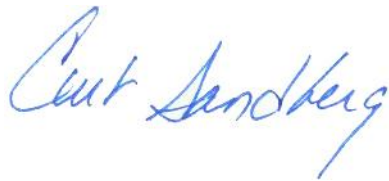
But, what are the underlying issues in our community? Our Participating Partner Agencies had helped us to identify the major issues, and these were included in our fund raising materials. However, we wanted to dig even deeper. For this we needed outside professional help. It came in the form of a \$31,730 grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation, together with \$13,880 of United Way funds, to conduct a thorough needs assessment of our community.

We hired the Vernon Research Group to conduct a community needs assessment which included four phases: 1) in-depth interviews with community leaders, 2) a telephone and web-based survey of community residents, 3) an in-depth survey of service providers and finally 4) focus group discussions to explore the issues generated in the three previous phases. The assessment started in November and we will have the results by April 2010.

Information gathered from this study will be used to help update United Way's strategic plan to meet the needs of the community. United Way wants to hear from residents, decision makers and service providers what they perceive as the critical and emerging issues in the community. As United Way and the Greater Grand Forks Community looks to the future, we need to understand how the different sectors can work together to understand and address the root causes to many of these problems.

Finishing out the year, United Way coordinates the Toys for Tots program, sponsored by the US Marine Corps. Families are referred to this program by caseworkers and United Way asks the public to donate new gifts for children, infants through 12 years old. In 2009, we collected 1,615 toys that were distributed to 535 children from 199 families.

I am proud of the accomplishments that our agency has made this year, and I look forward to seeing what more we can all do, if we don't just wear the shirt, but **LIVE UNITED!**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Curt Sandberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.