

# United Way kicks off annual campaign

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*Outgoing United Way of Monroe County Executive Director Barry Lessow reacts to getting a necktie as a parting gift as new Executive Director Efrat Feferman looks on during the annual campaign kickoff event Wednesday at the Fountain Square Ballroom. This year's campaign theme is "United We Fight. United We Win." Jon Streetman | Herald-Times*

The United Way of Monroe County kicked off its annual fundraising campaign Wednesday, while also celebrating its new executive director.

This year's campaign, "United We Fight. United We Win," was officially announced by Efrat Feferman, United Way's new executive director, during a luncheon at Fountain Square Ballroom. Feferman started the job last week, and said the transition has been smooth thanks to United Way's staff.

Barry Lessow, who retired after 13 years as executive director, was presented with a necktie emblazoned with his signature three E's, representing education, earnings and essentials.

"He's been a friend and mentor to so many individuals in our community, and throughout our state," Feferman said.

In the past year, United Way donors distributed 1,760 books to 352 kindergarten students, funded more than 26,000 rides on Rural Transit and on city buses to help people get to work, helped 1,112 uninsured and low-income adults make 5,131 free visits to Volunteers in Medicine and provided 188,786 bags of groceries and 1,555,388 meals to Monroe, Owen and Greene county residents at risk of going hungry.

Feferman said collaboration among United Way's 25 member agencies helps people, highlighting that one in three local lives are affected in some way by United Way dollars.

"It really does take a village to tackle the evolving challenges out there, and no one sector, no one agency, no one individual can do it alone. Want to make a difference every single day? So do we. Fight with us to create the town that you want to live in, that you want to bring people to and you want your kids to stay in," Feferman said. "Help the organizations who come together to make life better in Bloomington, Ellettsville, Spencer and every house and farm in between."

Glen Hopkins, director of Richland-Bean Blossom's School Assistance Fund, and Stone Belt CEO Leslie Green both spoke about how agencies within the United Way strengthen each other and the county by working together.

Hopkins told a story of a student whose father was having trouble paying for medication the boy had been prescribed. The school's assistance fund paid half of the cost, and an agreement between agencies allows the student to attend the Boys and Girls Club after-school program.

"Our children will be winners in the classroom thanks to our fight, together," Hopkins said.

Green highlighted a Stone Belt client who has benefited from United Way-funded programs, including the art studio, Growing Opportunities greenhouse project and the job placement program.

"Being a recipient of financial support is only part of the benefit of being a United Way agency," she said. "We join with the other member agencies to strengthen the community. It is an effective way to reach so many and to do so much good."

This year's campaign begins without a target goal, measuring success by the impact donations will make.

People interested in contributing can go to [www.monroeunitedway.org](http://www.monroeunitedway.org) and securely donate online using a credit card. Donors also can download a pledge card and choose to contribute in other ways.

Companies interested in having a workplace campaign, or any group that would like a presentation about United Way or one of its member agencies, can contact Sarah Taylor at [sarah@monroeunitedway.org](mailto:sarah@monroeunitedway.org) or by calling 812-334-8370, ext. 13.