

United Way needs donor support to continue to serve at highest levels

Editorial staff | Posted: Saturday, September 19, 2015 2:00 am

A question from the audience at a forum on economic development Tuesday has relevance in connection to the annual campaign kickoff of United Way of Monroe County that occurred the next day.

The questioner acknowledged the Bloomington economy is strong, as the panelists all noted, but then wondered: If that's the case, why are our social service agencies having such trouble raising needed funds?

The questioner alluded to a drop in donations to Hoosier Hills Food Bank noted during the summer by executive director Julio Alonso. Donations were down 21 percent for the year at that point, a total of 224,000 pounds.

The Hoosier Hills Food Bank is one of 25 member agencies of United Way, which means it could see a slight bump if United Way makes its campaign goal announced Wednesday: \$1.3 million. That would be an increase over the \$1,285,869 collected from donors during the last campaign.

But there's a "rest of the story." Last year's goal was \$1,410,000, which is 7.8 percent higher than this year. It was \$15,000 more the year before that.

United Way's service to the community continues to be robust, and the needs of its member agencies continue to grow. It's only the community support that's going the other direction. This would be a great year to stop that trend, especially as the Bloomington economy continues to grow, albeit slowly.

United Way has narrowed its focus in recent years to a very simple trio of areas: education, earnings and essentials.

When you donate to United Way, the money stays in the community to help children, youth and adults reach their potential through education. It helps people build their earnings so they can provide for themselves and their families; and it is used to make sure everyone has access to essentials, such as food, housing, health care and help during a crisis.

On that last point, United Way officials report that 1,682 elderly people were able to stay in their homes because of services provided by member agencies; 194,821 bags of groceries and 1,328,750 meals were provided to men, women and children in Monroe, Owen and Greene counties; and 4-out-of-5 at-risk teens, victims of domestic violence, recovering addicts and families living in transitional shelters were moved into stable, affordable, safe housing through the efforts of member agencies.

The work on education and earnings help reduce the need for the spending on essentials. Those are preventative measures.

As we've reported before, the world has changed for United Way and fundraising with the proliferation of nonprofits that seem to be raising money all year round. But its importance persists, as a funder to its 25 member agencies — from the American Red Cross to Middle Way House to Volunteers in Medicine — but also as a collaborator that can bring together different stakeholders to solve problems. When there's a need in the community, United Way is there to help in a multitude of ways.

It needs the communities' help to be able to serve at the highest levels. Potential donors can visit www.monroeunitedway.org to learn more about how to help. Or you can call 812-334-8370.

Please show your support at whatever level you can.