

## **United Way of Johnson Co. active for 90 years**

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**FOR THE PRESS-CITIZEN • DECEMBER 30, 2009**

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Ninety years and more than \$35 million later, the United Way of Johnson County continues to mobilize our community to create pathways out of poverty and achieve lasting social change.

In 1919, a group of concerned Johnson County citizens founded the Social Service League United Welfare Drive and set out to raise money to support a network of human service organizations to help people in need. Led by former Iowa City Citizen publisher E.E. Johnston, the group hoped to raise \$37,000. Last year, Ron Reed, president and CEO of Mercy Iowa City, chaired the United Way campaign that raised more than \$2.65 million.

A look at the history of United Way of Johnson County reads like a who's who of our community's leaders during the past nine decades, with campaign and board leadership provided by Irving Weber, V.W. Bales, Robert F. Ray, William Meardon, Virgil Hancher, George Nagel, Fred Doderer, Tom Hoogerwerf, Marv Hartwig, Dwight Seegmiller, Dottie Ray, Nancy Willis, Dick Ferguson, Dick Schwab, Jane McCune, Charlie Funk and Sally Mason.

“The United Way of Johnson County is proud to continue its leadership role in providing a compassionate safety net for the health and human service needs of our area,” says Jeff Disterhoft, chairman of the United Way board of directors. “But that’s only the beginning. We’ve gone well beyond that role in recent years through deliberate steps to bring about genuine community impact through enhanced awareness, programming and partnerships. Those steps have truly resulted in better service to those in need within our community.”

Throughout its history, United Way of Johnson County has looked for ways to help all individuals and families thrive, including efforts in the past six years to focus more on addressing the root causes of issues such as homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence and poverty. In 2010, United Way will complete a process of assessing the human care needs in Johnson County, and with considerable input from community members, establish goals to be achieved by 2020.

United Way has partnerships with local government, schools, human service agencies, faith-based organizations, neighborhoods and the business community. “Ultimately, we all want the same things – a healthy, safe, vibrant community, where every person has the opportunity to live a good life,” says Christine Scheetz, president and CEO for United Way of Johnson County. “Research tells us that the building blocks of a good life are education, financial stability and the best possible mental and physical health.”

More than 15 percent of people living in Johnson County are living below the poverty level, meaning a gross monthly income under \$903 for an individual or \$1,838 for a family of four, including 3.8 percent of people over 65 and 5.2 percent of all families in the community. Some 40.8 percent of female-headed household with children under the age of 5 are living in poverty.

“There is an increasing gap between tremendous wealth and devastating poverty in our community,” says Scheetz, “United Way helps bridge these two by offering a resource to help people give, advocate and volunteer to change our community conditions.”

For more information about how to donate to the United Way or get involved, visit [www.unitedwayjc.org](http://www.unitedwayjc.org) or call 338-7823.

**Charitable and nonprofit organizations have told their stories in an Iowa City Press-Citizen series of December columns. This is the last installment.**

## **HISTORY OF UNITED WAY OF JOHNSON COUNTY**

1919: Founded as the Social Service League United Welfare Drive

1930: Name Changes to Community Chest

1941: Name Changes to Iowa City Community Chest

1943: Name Changes to War-Community Chest

1958: Name Changes to Community Givers of Iowa City, Coralville, and University Heights

1961: Roberta Patrick is hired as first half-time Executive Secretary

1968: Name Changes to United Community Services of Johnson County, Iowa, Inc.

1971: Name Changes to United Way of Johnson County, Inc.; Linda Glazer hired as first Executive Director.

1972: Pat Hanrahan replaces Glazer as Executive Director

1977: Mary Ann (Volm) Madden replaces Hanrahan as Executive Director.

1993: Teresa McLaughlin replaces Madden as Executive Director

1998: Beverly Weber replaces McLaughlin as Executive Director

2004: Connie Benton Wolfe replaces Weber as President and CEO.

2008: Christine Scheetz replaces Benton Wolfe as President and CEO.