



# United Way seeks \$635K in fund drive

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**By: John Flowers**

MIDDLEBURY — The United Way of Addison County (UWAC) has set the same \$635,000 fundraising goal for 2021 that it did for 2020. And organizers are hoping that just like last year donations end up topping that target.

“With the uncertainty of the economy and everything else going on in the world, we decided to keep a rather conservative goal for the year ahead, hoping we’ll be able to exceed it,” said UWAC Executive Director Helena Van Voorst.

The UWAC has 29 Addison County nonprofit partners with which it shares revenues from its annual fund drive. This year’s campaign kicks off with the organization’s annual “Days of Caring” on Thursday, Sept. 23, and Saturday, Sept. 25.

During those two days, individuals and workers from several county businesses will roll up their sleeves to volunteer at some of the UWAC’s partner nonprofits, helping out with landscaping, painting, window washing and other chores that the beneficiaries don’t have the time or resources to complete.

Van Voorst said, as in the past, Middlebury College students will make up a large percentage of this year’s more than 100 Days of Caring volunteers. You’ll see them out and about, many of them sporting UWAC T-shirts with this year’s slogan: “Ready to Live United.”

Leading the effort will be Amy Hoekstra, UWAC’s new volunteer and donor engagement coordinator. Anyone interested in assisting the United Way effort should contact Hoekstra at 388-7189.

The COVID-19 pandemic and a desire to reach more prospective donors has prompted a few changes in UWAC’s fundraising strategies this year, Van Voorst noted.

For example, “Spin United” — through which participants would gather pledges for time spent on an exercise bike at a group session — has been replaced by a new, “0.5-K Race For The Rest Of Us,” set for Sunday, Oct. 10, from 3-6 p.m. It’s 0.31 miles, so people of all ages (and their leashed pets) can walk, dance, skip jump or hope their way to the finish line. Once there, they’ll be part of a gathering that will include food, “swag” bags, beverages and live music.

It will start at the end of Wilson Road (participants will park at G. Stone Motors) and will end at the Middlebury Fitness parking lot, where the UWAC is now based.

Those interested can register for the race at [tinyurl.com/222mrsa](https://tinyurl.com/222mrsa). The registration fee is \$15 for adults, \$5 per child; the fee rises to \$20 for adults and \$10 for kids after Sept. 12. Money generated by the race is used to advance UWAC’s 2021 fund drive.

“The idea is to have some fun, be outdoors and raise some money for our campaign,” Van Voorst said.

With most Vermonters now vaccinated against COVID-19, the UWAC wants to resume activities with two groups that formed prior to the pandemic: The “365 Small Business Circle” and the “Emerging Leaders of Addison County.” Members of these groups have injected new life into philanthropic endeavors in our area, according to UWAC officials.

The 365 Small Business Circle allows busy entrepreneurs, business owners and managers an opportunity to make a significant impact on the United Way campaign with one annual gift, ranging from \$365 (\$1/day) to \$1,460 (\$4/day).

Emerging Leaders of Addison County is a group working to identify, develop and empower the next generation of philanthropic leaders through community service, leadership development, and fun networking opportunities, according to the UWAC website.

In return for a donation pledge, members are offered a series of “lunch and learns,” membership in the Addison County Chamber of Commerce, hands-on volunteer and community building opportunities through United Way, and chances to associate with other local entrepreneurs.

The 365 Small Business Circle drew around 15 members during its first year (2020), and has picked up an additional 21 memberships so far this year, according to Erin Reed, UWAC’s development & marketing director.

Looking at recent trends, Van Voorst said the UWAC has seen a decline in payroll deduction donations, but fortunately an increase in contributions from individuals.

“We’ve been really fortunate, because we have such a nice relationship with our donors here in Addison County, so we’ve weathered (the payroll deduction donation decline) really well,” Van Voorst said. “Workplace giving is still an important part of our backbone, and is vitally important to our campaign success, but we saw tremendous increases in giving from our individual donors.”

Last year, 946 households gave an average of \$100 to the UWAC campaign.

The organization last year created new giving levels to give people more varied donation options, each of which comes with public recognition.

The UWAC’s gift categories used to consist of the following levels: Annual Campaign (Under \$1,000), Leadership Campaign (\$1,000-\$1,249), Robert Frost (\$1,250 to \$9,999), and Toqueville Campaign (more than \$10,000).

The organization has added Robert Frost Silver (\$2,500-\$4,999), Robert Frost Gold (\$5,000 to \$7,499) and Robert Frost Platinum (\$7,500 to \$9,999).

Van Voorst is also proud of the way the UWAC has been able to help individuals and nonprofits impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization last year mounted a special “Addison County Responds” campaign to specifically provide quick emergency relief to hard-hit individuals/families, while also providing continued funding for its partner agencies on the front lines.

Addison County Responds raised \$216,591 from 429 donors in just 105 days. This money has helped area nonprofits transition to business under COVID protocols, according to Van Voorst.

“We’re hearing the costs of doing business are increasing for a lot of our nonprofit partners,” she said. “They’re needing to be able to build hybrid programming, so a lot of our emergency response funds have been earmarked for the purchase of technology to allow for that. And if they have to meet in person, their PPP costs are going up ... Folks are needing new air filtration systems or new outdoor spaces for clients to meet or children to play, so the funds are being used to support those efforts as well.”

Reed is pleased to see a new generation of donors coming into the UWAC fold, gaining knowledge about the county’s safety net and how it helps the poorest and most vulnerable citizens.

“We’re excited,” Reed said of the campaign. “One positive note from the pandemic is we have seen new donors learn about the UWAC and want to give locally. It’s exciting to see those people, and teach them about UWAC.”

For all things UWAC, go to [unitedwayaddisoncounty.org](https://unitedwayaddisoncounty.org).

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