**Strength in Numbers: United Way’s Annual Workplace Giving Campaign**

**By United Way of Southeast Alaska**

Each year, the United Way of Southeast Alaska sets a fundraising goal for its Annual Workplace Giving Campaign. The 2017 target: $450,000.

“Sounds like a tall order, when you put it that way,” says Peggy Cowan, an education consultant by profession and co-chair of this year’s Workplace Giving Campaign. “But there’s strength in numbers. Actually, $450,000 can be quite manageable—if we all give a little, a little at a time.”

She has a point. According to recent data, Southeast Alaska’s labor force totals 45,260 jobs. If every single employee automatically directed $1 a week from his or her paycheck, the United Way’s Workplace Giving Campaign would raise $450,000 in less than three months. A whole year at that rate would exceed $2.3 million.

“The United Way is designed to serve—and be served by—everyone in Southeast Alaska,” says Cowan, noting that individual donations, as opposed to corporate or philanthropic foundation giving, comprise the bulk of United Way fundraising. This in turn supports more than 30 non-profit organizations, serving 21 communities throughout the region.

“Obviously, we’re extremely grateful to our corporate and foundation partners, but the Workplace Giving Campaign is our backbone,” she says. “It’s local people giving back to other local people.”

As the name implies, the annual Workplace Giving Campaign is the United Way’s highly-valued and longstanding yearly effort to raise funds in support of its own mission—to improve the lives and communities of Southeast Alaska—as well as the programs of its partner agencies. These partners range from hospice care in Haines to social services in Sitka, youth initiatives in Ketchikan to senior centers in Juneau and family programs in Petersburg, not to mention various community organizations serving the region as a whole, such as the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

“People who live in isolated communities build a culture of helping each other,” says Tom Sullivan, Southeast Regional Manager for First National Bank Alaska, and the 2017 Workplace Giving Campaign’s other co-chair.

“Because of our unique geography, it’s up to all of us to be ‘first responders,’ so to speak,” he explains. “The United Way provides an easy, effective mechanism for that. All we need to do is the keep the mechanism running smoothly.”

Since 1974, the United Way of Southeast Alaska has been working to “advance the common good” by identifying community issues and then focusing a response to those issues. Its “Live United” movement—with a rationale of extending a hand to one, improves society for all—outlines a clear strategy for public service: “Give, Advocate, Volunteer.”

To that end, the United Way of Southeast Alaska channels its charitable contributions and coordinates community response as efficiently and effectively as possible. Partner agencies, while working to achieve different goals, all focus on at least one of what the United Way terms the “Three Building Blocks for a Good Life”: education, income and health.

In Sullivan’s thinking, not only does the Workplace Giving Campaign remain one of the most simple and effective ways for employees to give back to their community; it is also one of the most significant resources employers can offer to address community issues.

“Most businesses are already active in the community, giving of their time, talents and financial resources,” says Sullivan. “The Workplace Giving Campaign allows these businessmen and women the opportunity to let their employees share in that philanthropy, to demonstrate their care and concern for their fellow Southeast neighbors.”

And so Cowan and Sullivan set a high bar for this year’s campaign. Not only do they wish to increase total donations, but also continue to broaden the donor base by reaching out to retirees, as well as other individuals, businesses and organizations that donated to the campaign in the past, but not necessarily recently.

“I think we’re really starting to see heightened consciousness—here, and all across the country—about the importance of taking care of our neighbors,” Sullivan says, alluding to 2017’s unprecedented string of natural disasters, as well as the shrinking of government funding under increasingly tighter budgets.

“Now, even more than ever, a strong community will rely on the generosity of all of us, together,” adds Cowan. “I believe in Southeast Alaska and I believe in our future.”

*Learn more about United Way and its 31 partner agencies, visit www.unitedwayseak.org. For more information about the Workplace Giving Campaign, visit www.unitedwayseak.org/campaign. To donate online or pledge monthly payments through your credit, visit www.unitedwayseak.org/donate. To volunteer, visit getconnected.unitedwayseak.org.*