

FHSU stands united in giving love this February

I love the month of February! February brings us the optimism and fun of Groundhog Day. I get to celebrate my birthday and bask in the many blessings of my life. Valentine's Day provides moments to be thankful for those special someone's in our lives. And our university family at Fort Hays State University comes together to generously invest in our community through the United Way campus drive. This year, our goal is \$30,000, and I know we can get there.

Did you know that there are nearly 1,800 local United Ways around the world, located in 40 countries and territories, fueled by the work of 2.6 million volunteers working to improve lives? Collectively, the United Way raises \$5 billion dollars every year – all through the big-heartedness of people and companies who care. Fantastic!

The United Way was founded more than 125 years ago in Denver by a small group that included a woman, a priest, two ministers and a rabbi. Quoting from the website, "It sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, but they didn't walk into a bar; what they did do was recognize the need to work together in new ways to make Denver a better place." I always love a good story about people who come together to make our communities better.

The mission of the United Way is to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities around the world to advance the common good. The reason I look forward to partnering with the United Way is that its mission is so congruent with our mission. We strive to develop engaged global citizen-leaders. The work of the United Way also aligns with our institutional commitment to unlocking human potential. And the work of the United Way and its legion of volunteers serves the democratic, economic and social needs of our communities. The creation and application of new knowledge leads to social and economic advancements, innovation that solves problems, and global engagement that calls us to build partnerships that connects our students to the world. To me, the annual February campus drive is our opportunity to demonstrate locally how we walk our talk – with heart.

The United Way of Ellis County supports 23 programs provided by 18 agencies in Ellis County: American Red Cross, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Cancer Council, Catholic Charities, Center for Life Experiences, Cerebral Research Foundation, City of Ellis, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas, Early Childhood Connections, First Call for Help, Hays Area Children's Center, Hays Senior Center, KVC Wheatland Hospital, Options, Parents and Children Together, Western Kansas Association on the Concerns of the Disabled, and Western Kansas Child Advocacy Center.

As I review this list, my mind is flooded with thoughts of how our university supplements the campus drive throughout the year. For example, the Alpha Kappa Psi business fraternity has a long-standing tradition of organizing a campus blood drive for the Red Cross. Many of our student organizations have adopted philanthropies and even have a student organization called Tigers for Service.

Our students in Leadership 310 classes work together each spring to support community organizations in responding to community needs. Past endeavors include gathering supplies and donations for child victims of sexual abuse, filling a disaster response trailer to aid victims of

natural disasters, organizing campaigns for Options to support survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, and working with Breathe Coffee House to create a support system for people with mental health issues . Another project focused on reducing stress and conflict between landlords and tenants by informing tenants of their rights and responsibilities. Yet another featured our students uniting dancers and the Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas (DSNWK) individuals to produce a show that inspired the community.

The Dancing Together for DSNWK event is a powerful memory for me. I will never forget watching Natalie McCullough dance. Natalie is the daughter of Jason McCullough, the Tigers' head cross country and track coach, and Karen McCullough, FHSU director of Career Services. It was a remarkable moment, given Natalie's disabilities, and I still smile and tear up every time I recall that emotional memory.

The list of how our faculty, staff, and students make our community better is endless. I am so proud of the generosity of this community and how we put our mission, vision and values into action.

Of course, as we approached the start of our campus United Way campaign, we had to get imaginative – while doing the pandemic dance of social distancing, wearing masks, etc.– as we worked to create engaging opportunities to inform folks about the important mission of the United Way and the many ways they can to contribute to the campaign.

So, what will our campus and community have to look forward to as we celebrate the United Way? For starters, we decided to host two Food Truck Fridays with Smokin Co. BBQ. The local BBQ business on wheels was on campus last Friday and will return again on Feb. 19. Special thanks to our United Way campus campaign coordinator, Janette Meis. I believe in the power of philanthropy to bring people together in support of the greater good, so I plan to share more information about the United Way campaign in my next column. Stay tuned!