

Making someone else's day a little bit brighter

As the month of February progresses, so does our United Way Campus Campaign at Fort Hays State University. We have had one successful food truck Fridays with Smokin Co. BBQ and a birthday challenge. Since I turned 60 earlier this month, staff thought it would be fun to offer a challenge: Anyone who donates \$60 or more to the United Way Campus Campaign will be eligible to win a prize from local businesses.

A special thank you to the following local businesses for supporting the United Way Campus Campaign, which is all about improving lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities around the world to advance the common good: Anhelu Massage & Wellness; CJ Snaps; Flowers by Frances; Paisley Pear Wine Bar, Bistro and Market; PoPt Gourmet Popcorn; Stephanie Jacobs, All the Rage Studios; and The Inn at 117.

Speaking of advancing the common good, let me highlight just a few of our campus colleagues who responded when we asked, "What's Your United Way Story?"

Jason Williby, president and CEO of the FHSU Foundation, has been a proud American Red Cross blood donor since his days as a Fort Hays State undergraduate. He has a vivid recollection of his fraternity, Sigma Phi Epsilon (SigEp), walking all new members to the blood drive at the Memorial Union. "As new members, we were all encouraged to donate at the same time as a team-building experience. Giving blood is such an easy way to give back to the community. In giving just one hour of your time, a donor can help save up to three lives. I am proud to have donated 65 times since 1994."

FHSU senior Audra Boerger, a marketing major from McPherson and a VIP Ambassador on campus, worked for Options Domestic and Sexual Violence Services through FHSU and Dane G. Hansen's internship program last summer. Boerger said she was moved by her experience at Options, a United Way-supported agency. "After my program was over, I found a passion in helping survivors find the resources that they need and aiding them through their healing journey. Through the volunteer work I have done; I feel like I make an impact in a way that I cannot even begin to comprehend. The survivors are the ones who are important, and my job is to make them feel that way."

Over the years, several of our students have really enjoyed their service with Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Ellis County. One of those current volunteers is Amari Angram-Boldin, a senior Tiger football player from Pahokee, Fla. He said that he can identify with some of the children in the program after growing up the oldest of three children in a one-parent household. "When I considered volunteering, I instantly thought about how badly I wanted a big brother as a role model growing up. I look at it as an opportunity to pay back and make an impact in a kid's life, because I know how happy it made me when older guys would take me under their wings when I was a child."

Amy Schaffer, FHSU's compliance officer, volunteers as a board member for the United Way because she has seen how the organization brings people, agencies and donations together to make the biggest impact. "I have always worked in jobs where I assist people going through difficult situations and often, I would connect them to a United Way agency to get additional

support. I saw how the United Way partner agencies helped provide resources to help the person move forward, whether it was shelter, food, mentoring services or financial assistance. Since I joined the board, I have also seen how the United Way brings resources together to help bring positive changes to our community.”

Through its core grief support groups, the Center for Life Experience, Inc. (CFLE) provides peer-to-peer support for individuals dealing with loss. Thanks to funding from individuals and organizations such as the United Way, CFLE continues to work for hope and healing within our community. Dawne Leiker, an academic advisor in the Department of Informatics, serves as president of the executive board of CFLE. “I’m very grateful for the investment that United Way has made in our organization. It has helped us transition to a community-based 501c3, where we can be more responsive to our community’s needs. Peer-to-peer grief support is now so very critical, as many people are facing devastating losses throughout the pandemic. Thanks to United Way for supporting our mission!”

Janette Meis, communications specialist in the Office of the President, first became involved with the United Way in the late '90s when she was the director of CASA of the High Plains, a member agency. “Since then I have been a long-time donor and now am involved with the Wonder Women League (WWL), which operates under the United Way. The WWL celebrates the power of women in this community who give not only money, but time and service for others. I’m proud to be associated with so many wonderful women and the work that we do.”

Justin Greenleaf, associate professor of leadership studies, volunteers for the United Way because the organization works for the common good of our community. “The United Way is able to address problems facing Ellis County in ways that I would not be able to alone. Through a systems-level approach, they provide support where it is needed most.”

FHSU junior Kellyn Wahlmeier, a communication sciences and disorders major from Colby and a VIP Ambassador, shared that she was surprised by how much she gained from serving as a big sister for Big Brothers Big Sisters. “It’s time that I get to spend away from school, focusing on making someone else’s day just a little bit brighter.”

I cannot think of a better sentiment than that – serving with love and fueled by the financial resources and shared mission of United Way agencies makes our communities better. It also consistently makes “someone else’s day just a little bit brighter.” For me, focusing on activities that can positively change the lives of other people is why I get up every morning with a smile and a purpose.

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