

# At award breakfast, Fox Valley United Way marks its 90th year

BY STEPHANIE LULAY

slulay@stmedianetwork.com

AURORA — The Fox Valley United Way's annual award breakfast at Piper's Banquets Thursday was a special one: the organization is celebrating 90 years of serving the Fox Valley.

And although the non-profit has nine decades of memories, the morning wasn't spent looking back. Instead, Fox Valley United Way CEO Michael Meyer talked about the future.

Following many years of planning, Meyer said the United Way and other groups have launched SPARK: Strong, Prepared

and Ready for Kindergarten, an early childhood initiative geared toward ensuring every 6-year-old child in the city is ready when they start school. The woman who made the collaboration possible was honored as the 2012 Live United award winner: Maryanne Locklin, associate professor of nursing at Aurora University. Locklin stepped up to chair the Success by Six committee that led to SPARK, Meyer said.

"Maryanne is someone who cares deeply about her community and was a major contributor to our success in recent years," Meyer said. "Without her dedication and perseverance we would have

never gotten where we are."

SPARK's goal is to ensure all of Aurora's young children have equal access to quality early learning opportunities.

"In Aurora there are only 49 slots of publicly funded preschool for every hundred 3- and 4-year-olds who are at high risk of not being ready for kindergarten," Meyer said.

Start-up funding for the program is being provided through the Dunham Fund. Representatives presented the United Way with a \$250,000 check toward the initiative on Thursday. Meyer introduced Trish Rooney, the newly-hired director of SPARK, at the breakfast.

## Other awards

The Outstanding Community Volunteer award went to Bryan Basilico, longtime United Way board member, and the Rita Anderson Smith award was given to past board of directors chair Melinda James.

Organizations and businesses honored with Community Action Awards were: the Aurora Fire Department Water Rescue Team; City of Aurora; Hotel Arista; ComEd; Wrigley; The Fox Valley Building & Construction Trades Council; Jewel-Osco and Prisco's Fine Foods. Kane County Sheriff Pat Perez and Kendall County Sheriff Richard Randall were honored as campaign co-chairs.

Caterpillar was honored as the top contributor in 2011-12 with more than \$169,000.

Old Second National Bank was honored as having the largest percentage increase in employee contributions, at a 72 percent increase in giving.

Hallmark Services was recognized for the largest dollar increase in employee contributions and Castle Bank/Castle Insurance was honored as most successful new workplace fundraising campaign.

**Volunteer of the Year Award Winner Brian Basilico with B2b Interactive Marketing.** | PHOTO SUBMITTED



**Peter (last name withheld) provided a testimony on behalf of United Way funded Agency, Hope For Tomorrow**

| PHOTO SUBMITTED



**Among Community Action Award winners: Aurora Fire Chief Hal Carlson, representing the department's Water Rescue Team and Carrie Anne Ergo, representing the city of Aurora.**

| PHOTO SUBMITTED