

LocalNews

Donors, volunteers honored at annual United Way breakfast

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AURORA — At the United Way's breakfast Thursday morning it was all about the stories: changed lives, the less fortunate helped and a difference made.

The breakfast, which serves as the organization's annual update to the community, is a chance for donors and United Way supporters to hear the living testimonials from those who have been helped by donated dollars right here in the Fox Valley, said Michael Meyer, executive director of the Fox Valley United Way.

He said the hundreds in the room at Piper's Banquets — donors, volunteers, corporate leaders, heads of non-profits and those helped by United Way donations — have many great stories to tell of transformation.

"We have worked toward the same goal, to help those in need in our community," Meyer said.

Seven years ago, Don Phelps was on an "ugly fall" when rock bottom hit: on Feb. 16, 2006, he was arrested for drunken driving for a third time in a matter of weeks. The then-alcoholic was estranged from his wife and two children, his 10-year career in the ministry was gone and he was sitting in a DuPage County jail cell.

Phelps, of Aurora, was released to Hope For Tomorrow, an Aurora social service agency that operates six homes as part of a counseling program to help those with substance abuse issues or mental health issues.

The "safe, inviting, and supportive environment" was

just the one he needed, Phelps said.

Today, Phelps is reunited with his family, is again a full-time church worker and is working toward reinstatement in the ministry.

Theresa Harden of Aurora struggles to this day to overcome physical injuries she sustained in a 1996 drive-by shooting on the East Side of Aurora. Harden was shot at a dozen times, and nine of the bullets hit her. She spent two months in a coma.

That's exactly why she's so thankful that Aurora's Triple Threat Mentoring program stepped in to help her son in ways that she couldn't, she said.

"I had no one to help me (at home)," she said.

Her 17-year-old son struggled with anger and spent time in alternative schools, she said, before Triple Threat stepped in.

"I just thank God for Triple Threat being there for him," she said.

Her son is now working toward graduating at West Aurora High School.

Another Fox Valley family was helped by the Aurora Area Interfaith Food Pantry when they found out they would soon be unexpectedly welcoming triplets.

"My husband worried his income wasn't sufficient to support such a large family," mother Teresa said in Spanish through an interpreter. But the food pantry was able to fill in the gaps for her family, including her three growing 5-year-old boys.

The Fox Valley United Way helps support 54 social service agencies in Kane and Kendall counties.

Awards

Susan Bill of Castle Bank was honored with the 2013 Outstanding Community Volunteer Award at the Thursday breakfast. Bill co-leads the Yorkville-driven Castle Challenge, a Castle Bank-sponsored organization that aims to raise funds for Yorkville Sports Boosters, according to Meyer. She also serves on the Fox Valley United Way's Resource Development Committee, and volunteers at the Kendall County Food Pantry, the Yorkville Chamber of Commerce and many other area organizations.

Meyer said Bill's positive attitude is contagious.

"She's the kinds of volunteer you wish you had 10 of," he said.

The Dunham Fund Board of Directors and Mayor Tom Weisner were both honored with the 2013 Live United Awards for their support of Aurora's SPARK early education initiative.

The Aurora Fire Department Water Rescue Team, City of Aurora, Hotel Arista, Exelon/ComEd, the Fox Valley Buildings & Construction Trades Council, Wrigley Corporation and Prisco's Fine Foods were all honored with Community Action Awards for their support of United Way fundraisers during the last year.

The 2012-2013 Major Firm Top Corporate Contributor title was awarded to Caterpillar; Financial Institution Top Contribution title was awarded to Old Second Bank; and Educational Institution Top Contribution title was awarded to the Indian Prairie School District.