

'Superheroes' honored at United Way breakfast

Leaders of two food pantries, contributions by workers praised

BY STEPHANIE LULAY

slulay@stmedianetwork.com

AURORA — It was a day for the Fox Valley "superheroes," said Michael Meyer, CEO of Fox Valley United Way.

Live United award winners Marilyn Weisner and Maria Spaeth, executive directors of the Aurora Interfaith Food Pantry and the Kendall County Food Pantry, respectively, were honored at the annual Fox Valley United Way breakfast at Piper's Banquets last week. More than 300 people attended the event.

"Today we celebrate the true heroes of the Fox Valley," Meyer said.

"Whether they have volunteered, advocated or donated, these superheroes have gone above and beyond to help people they didn't know."

Meyer said that demand for food continues to climb in the Fox Valley. The Aurora pantry is serving more than 8,000 people per month and the Kendall pantry is serving about 4,500 people per month, he said.

"Those are huge increases since the recession hit," he said. "They're doing wonderful work."

Dorothy Fairbanks, who does "a mountain of volun-



Denzel Brown, 7, of Aurora, gives a speech at the 2011 Fox Valley United Way Annual Breakfast while his mother Candice watches. Brown spoke about the impact that Boy Scouting has had on him and thanked United Way for sponsoring so many youngsters in the Three Fires Council.

| MARIANNE MATHER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

teering," said Meyer, was named Outstanding Community Volunteer of the year.

She volunteers at Ginger Creek Community Church, the United Way's Adopt a Child Holiday Assistance

program and a host of programs that help residents at the Eastwood public housing complex.

Joel Ottoson, who volunteers for Kendall County PADS and Caring Hands Thrift Store, is also a base-



Audience members, including Hesed House Executive Director Ryan Dowd (center), watch a video during the 2011 Fox Valley United Way Annual Breakfast. | MARIANNE MATHER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

ball coach and Sunday School teacher. He received the 2011 Rita Anderson Smith Award.

Kane County Sheriff Pat Perez and Kendall Sheriff Richard Randall were honored for serving as United Way campaign co-chairmen three years in a row.

Fox Valley United Way raised \$1.2 million in 2010. While that's less than the non-profit was raising before the recession hit, it's a 15 percent increase from last year, Meyer said.

Hallmark Services was honored for the largest percentage increase in employee contribution to United Way.

Their total donation was 98 percent higher than a

year ago, Meyer said.

UPS employees increased their donation to the Fox Valley United Way by \$25,000 compared to a year ago, according to Meyer, and Caterpillar was the non-profit's top contributor. The plant employees donated about \$250,000 to United Way.

Several representatives of groups the United Way supports spoke at the breakfast.

Representatives of the Boy Scouts Three Fires Council said that through the help of United Way, 13 Boy Scouts who couldn't afford to pay dues were still able to participate in the program.

"I thank everyone who

supports the Boy Scouts so I can have friends who do positive things," one of the representatives said.

People who have been helped by Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Aurora Interfaith Food Pantry and Hope for Tomorrow also spoke.

Fox Valley United Way Board Chairman Melinda James, who also is an administrator at Waubesa Community College, said that it's important that her workplace participates in giving and volunteering to benefit United Way.

"What you give ought to be in direct relation to what you receive. If you have been very blessed, then you have a great deal to give," she said.