United Way 2013 annual breakfast honors volunteers

By Pat Barcas
Staff writer

United Way once again showed how the organization truly cares about and helps the community of Aurora at its annual breakfast May 16.

Hundreds of donors, volunteers, politicians, public workers, union leaders and heads of non-profits packed the room at Piper's banquets to listen to Michael Meyer, executive director of the Fox Valley United Way, present the annual goings on as well as the inspirational guest speakers.

"We have many, many great stories of hope to be shared today. Together we have worked toward the same goal. Fight against poverty, and volunteer for those in need," said Meyer. "Today we are celebrating a community who cares."

Theresa Harden of Aurora shared her inspirational story of how she was struck by nine bullets during a 1996 drive-by shooting on the east side of Aurora. She was in a coma for two months and given 21 pints of blood — a staggering amount.

Pat Barcas photo

The Fox Valley Building and Construction Trades Council took home a Community Action Award at the Fox Valley United Way's annual breakfast May 16 for their support of United Way in 2012-13. From left, President Scott Roscoe, Bob Baier and Charlie Seibert.

"My son was just born, I had nobody there to help me," she said through tears. "At the time, as I was getting gunned down, I could only think of my two children."

Harden thanked Aurora's Triple Threat Mentoring program, who reigned in her now teenage son. The Fox Valley United Way directly supports Triple Threat, as well as 53 other social service agencies in Kane and Kendall Counties.

"Before Triple Threat came into my life, my son was so angry. Now, he feels like he's somebody. He's not a statistic, and I'm a living testimony," she said.

Don Phelps of Aurora took the stage to give his thanks to ever present Hope for Tomorrow, an organization that helps veterans and non-veterans alike with substance abuse problems.

"Seven years ago I could be described as hopeless. I had hit bottom after getting my third DUI in six weeks," he said. "I was sitting in a DuPage County jail cell, and I knew this was it."

His alcoholism spiraling out of control, Phelps was estranged from his wfe and two children, and his career in the ministry was gone.

The judge released him to Hope for Tomorrow May 16, 2006.

"On that day, the program began, and it was a safe, inviting environment," he said.

Now, Phelps is back with his family and is a full time church worker once again.

United Way annual breakfast awards:

Taking home the 2013 Outstanding Community Volunteer Award was Susan Bill of Castle Bank. Castle Bank was also honored as the only participating organization with a 100 percent employee participation rate.

The Fox Valley Buildings and Construction Trades Council, the Aurora Fire Department Water Rescue Team, Hotel Arista, Exelon/ ComEd, the City of Aurora, Prisco's Fine Foods and Wrigley Corporation were all presented with Community Action Awards for their support of United Way in 2012-13.

Educational Institution Top Contribution title was awarded to the Indian Prairie School District, with the Major Firm Top Corporate Contributor award going to Caterpillar, and the Financial Institution Top Contribution title awarded to Old Second Bank.

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