

United Way Sets Aggressive \$5 Million Goal

Kristi Yamaguchi, world-renowned figure skater, encourages attendees to be a champion for the community by supporting United Way.

United Way of Greater Battle Creek campaign leaders are calling on area residents to help raise an aggressive \$5 million to help those in need. The 2009 Community Solutions Campaign goal was announced during the United Way Kickoff luncheon in Mill Race Park, September 10, 2009.

Olympic Gold Medalist figure skater and 2008 *Dancing with the Stars* champion, Kristi Yamaguchi, made a special appearance at the community kickoff.

Yamaguchi had earlier made an appearance at Community Inclusive Recreation's Carnival in Bailey Park at Anybodies Playground, a boundless playground where people of all abilities are able to be active and play together. The Carnival was the agency's Day of Caring project where Yamaguchi and a group of Kellogg Company employees volunteered putting on activities and art projects for nearly 50 students from Doris Klaussen Developmental Center and Riverside Elementary School.

"The playground was a perfect backdrop for this volunteer project," said Yamaguchi, "I have funded similar playgrounds that are wheelchair accessible through my Always Dream Foundation. I think it is won-



derful that United Way helped fund this playground in the community."

At the Kickoff event, Yamaguchi commented on the importance of giving back to the community and encouraged attendees and the rest of the residents to be a champion for the community by supporting United Way.

"It's an honor to have a champion like Kristi Yamaguchi, take part in our campaign kickoff," said Chris Sargent, president and chief professional officer of United Way. "It's

so true that our donors are the champions in our community. Without them, many of the programs we fund wouldn't exist."

"We understand the growing need in the community," said Campaign Co-chair Michael "Mac" McCullough, general manager and executive editor of the Battle Creek Enquirer. "But with the tough economy the need is even greater and we know that the great people of this community will rise to the occasion."

"This campaign is not about dollars, it's about helping people," said Todd McDonald, campaign co-chair and group vice president & equity partner, CSM Group. "Participation is going to be key to the success of this year's campaign. We need as many of us who are working to give as we are able. And remember through United Way's 100% guarantee every individual gift directly supports vital community programs and services that help change people's lives for the better."

United Way proudly displayed the organizations slogan of "Live United" throughout the event and on the t-shirts worn by Days of Caring volunteers.

"It's more than a slogan," said Sargent, "it is a way to look at having an impact in the community. It's engaging individuals of all ages to be a part of the change that needs to occur in order to create a better life for all. And this year more than ever it's not about just wearing a shirt with two words on it, it's about living it! It's each of us taking personal responsibility for our community and helping those who are less fortunate."

Those who attended the Kickoff had an opportunity to hear first hand how United Way-funded programs do change lives. Four new success stories were introduced into the Faces United exhibit. Faces United is a travelling exhibit which features client success stories as well as inspirational stories from volunteers and agencies. This year's exhibit features Dr. Charlie Palumbo of the Dentists' Partnership; Rachel Osborn, program coordinator for the 211 Call Center; Pastor Creighton Mabry, United Way board member and youth advocate; and Ruth Harden, a client of Guardian Finance and Advocacy Services.

Linda Linke, executive director of Community Inclusive Recreation, spoke about the importance of including individuals of all abilities

in activities in our community. Her message also conveyed the importance of United Way's role in supporting the 50 programs operated by 35 nonprofit agencies that help provide services for those in need, of which she is a member.

Yamaguchi also helped announce this year's campaign goal by inviting some of the youth from Riverside Elementary and Doris Klaussen on stage. After a brief performance the 'judges' awarded the children a perfect score of **\$5 million**, this year's United Way community goal.

Before and after the Kickoff, several hundred volunteers took part in the United Way's 16th annual Days of Caring, doing everything from sorting clothing to helping build a house for a family in need. Days of Caring is a way for United Way supporters to see first-hand the needs that exist in the community and to discover opportunities to meet those needs. Over the years, Days of Caring has evolved from a one-day event to a year-round activity, with more than 2,500 volunteers participating this year.

