



VIEWS & VISIONS

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Neighbors Helping Neighbors: Are We “United” When It Comes to Community Support?

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John M. Ballengee is president and chief professional officer of United Way of Central West Virginia. The \$4.4 million non-profit organization is focused on improving the community through efficiencies, shared leadership and mobilization of resources.

Mr. Ballengee joined United Way in 2004, after a 31-year career in the banking industry. He served in several management positions at Charleston National Bank and Bank One, where he was named vice president-national credit support manager in 2002. He was an instructor with Marshall University Community College and the West Virginia Bankers Association School of Banking.

During his banking career, Mr. Ballengee served as a United Way campaign chairman, board member and volunteer. He also is a former board member, executive committee member and officer with Goodwill Industries of the Kanawha Valley.

He is a commissioner of the West Virginia Commission for National & Community Service and a member of the Charleston Area Alliance, the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce and the Kanawha Coalition for Community Health Improvement.

A native of Huntington, West Virginia, he received a BBA degree in accounting from Marshall University in 1972.

It is always interesting to see how people react to a crisis. Fires, floods, hurricanes, and other natural or unnatural events usually spark both compassion and support from those unaffected. But what about the crisis we don't hear about? What about the one “lost sheep” when we see that most of the flock is receiving assistance? How can we help neighbors we don't even know?

Let's take a look at the obvious. Every day there are more...more announcements of layoffs, closings, reduced spending, reduction or elimination of benefits...and the list goes on. Market correction? Maybe, but our current conditions cause many of our neighbors to be faced with a crisis they never anticipated. These times increase depression, physical violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, homelessness, medical problems, and worse. Without a safety net of social service agencies to deal with these crises, our communities will change in complexion very quickly, and we will not like what they become.

Three words come to mind...*neighbors helping neighbors*. Three additional words present an opportunity for anyone and everyone to get involved: *volunteer, donate, advocate*.



Volunteer

Nonprofit organizations all across West Virginia need help. They need board members, fund raisers, committee members, mentors, and every other type of volunteer they can find. When you volunteer, two things happen. First, your support helps leverage the financial support received by the organization. Second, you see “behind the scenes,” and obtain a better understanding of what a crisis really looks like.

Donate

People get nervous when asked to give their money away. Many feel threatened or concerned that their contribution will be wasted. On the other hand, most don't hesitate to clean out the closet and “donate” used clothing to the local thrift store. What would happen if we all gave enough to make a difference but not enough to hurt our personal situation? Let's look at the math: if 1.8 million West Virginia residents donated \$1.00 each week, \$93.6 million would be raised in one year! Could we all do without a dollar each week?

Advocate

Becoming an advocate of the nonprofit community means that you are willing to share the message and facts that will cause our communities to be more informed and educated. What will happen to our hospitals if free medical clinics are forced to cut back on services? We all should be aware of the needs in our community and how we can help with solutions. Promoting



that sort of education in our workplaces, neighborhoods, churches and social circles will help keep everyone in touch with real community issues.

What is the easiest way for “neighbors to help neighbors?” One solution is to contact your local United Way organization. Independent United Ways in every corner of West Virginia are working with nonprofit organizations to support and improve local social service programs and meet community needs. The reality is that a small percentage of individuals actually donate through United Way. Many donate to a specific agency which sometimes creates a popularity contest or rewards those agencies with the largest advertising and direct mail budgets. What about the agency that is small and can’t advertise? What about groups operated by part time staff or volunteers? United Way support goes in different directions because a lot of different programs and agencies focus on needs of the entire community. These agencies are tightening their fiscal belts while being faced with more and more demand for services.

Your local United Way can help you get connected with the entire community. Your financial assistance can be shared with multiple clients and agencies at the

same time. Volunteers charged with fund allocation will do the due diligence needed to ensure your donation is well spent. Your community and all of West Virginia will be a better place to live and work because of your involvement, the work of United Way, and the hundreds of social service agencies that meet the needs in our communities.

The word **TEAM** has been used in many different ways. In this instance we may want to consider that **T**ogether **E**veryone **A**chieves **M**ore. Your community needs you to volunteer, donate, and advocate and you will truly be a “neighbor helping neighbors.” ♡

CONTRIBUTING TO THE VITALITY OF OUR COMMUNITIES



Charles “Chazz” F. Printz, Jr.
Martinsburg, WV

Chazz is a board member of Shenandoah Valley Medical Systems, Inc. and Shenandoah Community Health Foundation. He also is a board member and secretary of Friends of the National Conservation Training Center. As a trained volunteer for Read Aloud West Virginia, he is a regular reader at Burke Street School in Martinsburg, which is a Partner in Education with Bowles Rice. He serves on the personnel committee for United Way of the Eastern Panhandle.



Sarah “Sally” E. Smith
Charleston, WV

Sally serves as chair of the Charleston Area Alliance’s Economic and Business Development Committee. She is a former chair of the Charleston Regional Chamber of Commerce’s board of directors and the former vice president for legislative affairs. She also was a member of the board of directors of Bridgemont Community and Technical College and is a former member of the board of trustees of the University of Charleston and West Virginia University Board of Governors.