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Greensboro's YMCA relying on United Way

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At **YMCA** of Greensboro, which provides \$500,000 a year in financial assistance to 2,300 families and individuals who otherwise could not afford its programs, demand has grown for scholarships, which are up 20 percent at one branch alone.

Driving the growth are "high gas prices and people having to make tough choices on coming to the Y and enrolling kids in camp," said Greg Jones, president and CEO.

Thus, support from **United Way** of Greater Greensboro is critical to help the Y continue to bridge the gap for families in the city's most economically distressed areas, he said.

"It makes a huge difference," Jones said. "Our dollars are going to our areas of most need, where the kids really need it."

As it prepares to kick off its annual fundraising drive Sept. 16 in the face of an increasingly gloomy economy, United Way is working on several fronts to secure the resources it needs to support its partner agencies and programs.

And while it has not yet set a goal for the drive, "we want to make sure it grows," said Keith Barsuhn, United Way's new president and CEO.

Chaired by Ed Kitchen, vice president of the **Joseph M. Bryan Foundation** and former city manager, the drive will focus on securing larger gifts from more individuals, enlisting more corporations to make gifts and sponsor workplace campaigns, offering a mass-market incentive to individual givers, and reaching out to retired people, said Baruhn.

In last year's drive, which raised \$13 million, donors giving \$1,000 or more accounted for 41 percent of the total raised.

This year, United Way is working to secure funds for a "challenge match" to provide an incentive to individuals to increase their giving to \$10,000 over two to three years.

While giving at those higher levels has been growing in recent years, Barsuhn said, United Way has seen a decline in the number of individuals giving at more modest levels through payroll deduction in workplace campaigns.

Roughly 26,600 donors gave to the drive in 2007, down just over 5 percent from the previous year, he said.

To help reverse that trend, United Way is working with local retailers to develop a “Caring Card” for donors who pledge \$10 a month, qualifying them for discounts from the retailers.

“If you can give \$120, you’re going to get that back by frequenting these businesses,” Barsuhn said. “It’s a way to capture this mass market of donors.”

The effort to secure bigger gifts will focus on engaging donors in the work of United Way and its partner agencies, he said.

United Way, for example, is developing a program to involve women making “Tocqueville” gifts of \$10,000 or more in its Thriving at Three initiative by teaming them with families and children up to age three.

Women represented 67 of the donors who gave \$10,000 or more to last year’s drive.

United Way also has launched special efforts to work with donors who have retired, many of them earlier than expected, and to recruit companies to make corporate gifts or run workplace campaigns for the first time.

And Barsuhn said he is talking to the media about helping United Way tell its story.

“The need is very great and very critical,” he said. “We need support now more than ever.”

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