

United Way gives over \$1 million to Phenix City agencies

By Denise DuBois
Online Editor

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United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley announced the recipients of the 2009-2010 grants recently. The Community Investment Grants are distributed in five different priority areas: Helping Children and Youth Succeed, Providing Basic Human Needs, Economic Independence, Promoting Health, Wellness and Healing and Disaster Relief and Access to Community Resources.

Seven agencies in Phenix City and Russell County received approximately \$1.01 million in funds. These funds allow agencies to continue offering services to the people in the area.

The Russell County Child Advocacy Center received \$81,000; the same amount it received last year.

Executive Director Lynn Hart said it is a blessing they didn't get cut this year, especially since the budget is being cut in other areas.

"We are delighted to get the same amount," she said, "and didn't have to suffer budget cuts."

The money the agency received will continue to fund programs like STARS and KEEP (Kids Engaged in Education and Prevention). Through the center, Hart said they perform around 140-150 forensic interviews per year.

This time last year, she said, they conducted 10 interviews with kids under the age of 6. Since the start of this year, they have already done 24 interviews for kids under 6. The youngest child is 2 years old.

Hart credits the number to parents being more aware of their children and being better educated about prevention.

With the help of United Way, the agency hopes to more than the 8,000 kids they educated last year in the schools. Hart said they want to do things during the summer and talk to middle and high school aged kids about cyber bullying, internet and cell phone abuse this year.

Teen University received \$46,000 from United Way this year. Teen University is a residential boys' group home that helps those kids reach full potential.

The Russell County Red Cross received \$100,000 from United Way. The Red Cross offers health and safety classes and provides for disaster stricken families in the area.

Scott Ferguson, President and CEO of United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley said,

"United Way works to create opportunities for a good life for all by investing in programs proven to help people when they need it most. Many individuals and families are struggling right now and United Way funding will make a lasting difference in their lives and in our community."

A total of 47 programs provided by 25 agencies in the eight-county area will receive \$5,052,564. The programs range from a residential crisis program in Phenix City for troubled teens, to life-essential services for families and individuals. The organization will also distribute about \$91,503 in donor designated funds to non-United Way partner agencies.

The Community Investment process is led by a team of volunteers who review each

program based on three performance areas of meeting a community need, achieving results and demonstrating good stewardship. Funding recommendations were made by the 72 volunteers who participated in the process. The volunteers evaluate each program application, attend on-site visits, and evaluate the program's ability to provide services effectively and efficiently. "Making sure the community's dollars are invested wisely is a huge responsibility and is one that these volunteers take very seriously, said Jacki Lowe, Region Vice President for Georgia Power and chair of this year's investment process. The commitment and thoroughness involved in all phases of United Way's Community Investment process is amazing. The volunteers give freely of their time and talent to ensure that gifts to United Way have impact on people right here in the Chattahoochee Valley and create lasting change."

Ferguson said that although the 2008 campaign was a huge success, the organization is projecting a significant increase in uncollectible pledges. "In any given year we don't collect 100 percent of pledges, people change jobs or leave the area. On average, we do not collect 8 percent of the pledges. However, because of the continuing economic uncertainty, along with continued lay-offs and closings, we have increased this to 12 percent of the total campaign. This equates to \$270,000 less money to allocate. The economic conditions make it tough on everyone, he stated. Internally, we have reduced our budget by more than 8 percent, including the elimination of three staff positions."