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## Drive exceeds \$6.4M goal, breaks record

**BY LARRY GIERER**  
Staff Writer

Leaders of United Way-funded agencies face a lot of stress as they strive to provide valuable services and find the funds to make their programs possible.

Don Sharitt said an announcement made Tuesday "takes a lot of stress off."

Richard Anthony, the chairman of this year's fundraising campaign for the United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley, told a gathering at the Cunningham Conference Center at Columbus State University that \$6,600,910 had been pledged. That surpasses the goal of \$6.4 million. It was the highest goal ever, by far, the highest total pledged.

"We built on the success we had last year," said Sharitt, who is the executive director of the Chattahoochee Council of Boy Scouts and the executive director of the United Way Executive Directors Association. "I'm not really surprised by how well United Way did this year. Everything was very well organized and the people in the community believe in what we're doing."

All the organizations conduct their own fundraising campaigns as well. "Usually, if the United Way campaign goes well, " he said. "The others do, too."

The United Way funds 50 programs in 22 agencies including Second Harvest Food Bank, Stewart Community Home, Hope Harbour and Easter Seals of West Georgia.

Anthony told those representing the agencies that it was an "ambitious goal" that was reached and that fundraising even in a caring community such as Columbus "can never be taken for granted," noting that other cities fall short.

He said he dreamed such a total could be pledged and he was "tickled to death."

Guy Sims is retiring as United Way president and to go out like this was akin to a coach winning the Super Bowl in his last outing.

"It's real exciting," Sims said. "We live in a community that has demonstrated that it cares. It's very rewarding knowing we'll have the funds to address so many needs."

He thinks that future campaigns will also be successful.

"With more people moving here because of BRAC, more businesses opening, I see United Way continuing to succeed."

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Contact Larry Gierer at 706-571-8581 or [lgierer@ledger-enquirer.com](mailto:lgierer@ledger-enquirer.com)