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United Way Celebrates 85th Anniversary and Kicks Off 2009 Community Campaign

JACKSONVILLE, FL – United Way of Northeast Florida kicked off its 2009 community campaign today at Hemming Plaza in downtown Jacksonville. With nearly 400 guests in attendance, United Way’s 2009 Campaign Cabinet, comprised of past and future campaign leadership as well as key community volunteers, rallied the audience and paid tribute to the organization’s 85-year heritage at the site of its founding in 1924.

Unlike the organization’s traditional sit-down luncheons or evening receptions, the down-home flapjack breakfast hearkened back to simpler times, drawing community citizens as well as employee campaign volunteers and donors to Hemming Plaza.

In recognition of United Way’s 85th Anniversary, a tribute flame was lit by a senior, a youth mentor and preschooler, representing United Way’s three areas of focus: early childhood success, helping students achieve, and senior engagement and independence. This special ceremony recognized United Way’s legacy and renewed commitment to improving lives on the First Coast.

As a group of Campaign Cabinet volunteers unveiled signs revealing “Every Gift Counts,” the crowd rallied and cheered, shouting the message together.

United Way Board of Trustees Chair Mike Cascone said, “This year, now more than ever, we need our entire community to step forward to support our children, youth, seniors and families who are counting on us.”

While today officially kicks off the beginning of United Way’s annual giving campaign, many businesses and organizations held workplace campaigns early to jumpstart the Community Campaign. The dollars raised from participating Pacesetter organizations and other early gifts totaled \$7,030,441. The results of the Pacesetter campaigns were announced during the kickoff (See attached list).

Cascone and Past Board and Campaign Chair Pamela Y. Paul highlighted four key areas of emphasis in this year’s giving campaign: delivering strong workplace campaigns with increased employee participation; establishing new workplace campaigns in high-growth sectors; tapping the commitment of current major donors to both “give and get” and seeking new major gift participants; as well as broadening the base of givers by reaching out to retirees, young professionals, and community citizens.

While not establishing a specific target, United Way’s leadership is striving to reach the dollars that were raised in 2008 and add to those in order to achieve more funding for such needs as: 74 more youth receiving one-one-one mentoring; 244 more families being helped to avoid foreclosure, 416 more caregivers receiving parenting workshops; and 4,180 more balanced meals for seniors.

United Way Board of Directors Chair Barbara Drake stated, “The Northeast Florida community is doing all that it can to rally and demonstrate support for its citizens. Dollars raised in this campaign will work to address today’s immediate basic needs, while investing in long-term solutions to our region’s most pressing problems.”

Connie Hodges, United Way of Northeast Florida's president, explained, "Working together with individuals, businesses, and agency and program partners, we continue to strive for the ultimate goal – to build a stronger, healthier community, both for those who live here today and those who will call the First Coast home in the future."

United Way of Northeast Florida works to create real, long-lasting change in Northeast Florida by focusing on the building blocks for a good life. In partnership with volunteers, community organizations, and leaders, United Way is creating opportunities to improve life for people in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau and northern St. Johns counties. In addition, United Way leads United Way 2-1-1, a 24/7 information referral hotline; Life: Act 2, a pro-active response to an exploding senior population; and Full Service Schools, a community approach to removing barriers to academic success. For more information, call 904-390-3200 or visit www.LiveUnitedNortheastFlorida.org.

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