

# LEADING

*the Way*

Alexis de Tocqueville Newsletter  
Winter 2022

We are keenly aware of the challenges some Stark County individuals and families face with respect to maintaining and improving their financial footing, especially as it relates to child poverty. We see, first hand, the obstacles many in our community face with the affordability of health care needs. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted children who were already struggling to acquire and maintain a level of literacy to become productive members of our community. When taking into consideration these challenges, we are extremely grateful to our fellow Alexis de Tocqueville members for acknowledging the needs and responding with generosity and care for those who rely on United Way now more than ever.



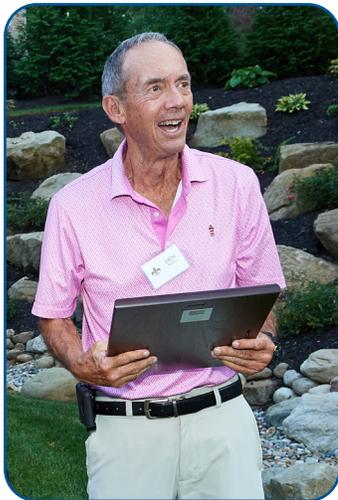
Chris and Michele Goff

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to help meet our community's needs, especially at a time when external forces are so unpredictable.

**Chris Goff, CEO & General Counsel, Employers Health**  
**Michele Goff, Community Volunteer**  
**2021 Alexis de Tocqueville Society Co-Chairs**

## Alexis de Tocqueville Appreciation Event

On September 14, 2021, Chris and Michele Goff opened their beautiful home for members to gather and enjoy each other's company for the annual appreciation gathering. Members enjoyed the generosity, lovely weather, and caught up on everything after not seeing each other for a year and a half; hospitality was stellar. Highlights of the evening included words from Dave and Laura Grabowsky, United Way of Greater Stark County's 2021 Campaign Co-Chairs, Maria Heege, United Way President and CEO, and two of the most recent Tocqueville Mentors who have both made a lasting impact on our community, William (Bill) Luntz (sadly deceased January 1, 2022 whose wife, Sharon, spoke on his behalf), and Richard (Dick) Nicely.



Dick Nicely



Sharon, Janet, and Greg Luntz



# A MESSAGE FROM MARIA



**Maria Heege**  
President & CEO

**Note:** In September 2021, Maria Heege, United Way of Greater Stark County President & CEO announced her plans to retire from her position effective March 31, 2022, after a remarkable 41 years of service with the organization.

It has truly been my pleasure to serve in the role as President and CEO of United Way of Greater Stark County. I'm incredibly grateful to work alongside the staff, board, volunteers and supporters, who share my passion for this organization and this community. I'm so proud of all that we have accomplished together to improve lives for children and their families in this region. I know that through you, that good work will continue.

As Alexis de Tocqueville Society

members, you are the philanthropic leaders that make an enormous impact on our ability to pull individuals and families out of poverty. Your generosity allows us to support programs and provide access to resources throughout our community that help those who are struggling get firm footing on a path to stability. I am eternally grateful for all the support you have given this past year and, in many cases, multiple consecutive years.

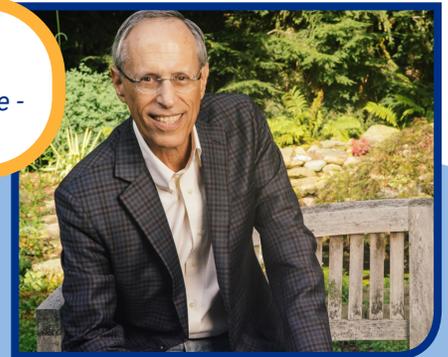
As I wind down my tenure at United Way of Greater Stark County and look forward to my journey ahead, I will forever be impacted and influenced by the generosity, kindness, friendship, and support you all have given so selflessly.

I cannot thank you enough!

A blue ink handwritten signature of Maria Heege.

## GARY SIRAK Sharing His Story

Gary, President of Sirak Financial Services, is the author of 3 books including *How to Retire and Not Die - The 3 Ps That Will Keep You Young*



### Early Impressions Life Lessons

I grew up in Canton, Ohio in the 1950s, six of us living in a two-bedroom house. The earliest memories I have of my parents are of them sitting around the kitchen table. They weren't eating. They were discussing how to make ends meet. I remember seeing my mom with a stack of envelopes in front of her – one for each bill due – and she was shuffling money between them. I remember the tension in the room as she and my father were going back and forth about which bills to pay and which they could put off until next month.

My father started in the life insurance business and it was a slow start. He took a second job selling shoes. He hated the shoe business but it was necessary to buy food and pay the bills. He'd come home in a bad mood, throw what money he earned on the

kitchen table where mom promptly picked it up and filed it away in the proper envelope.

I realized quickly if there was something I wanted, like toys or a comic book, I had to earn it. I sold YMCA mints door-to-door in order to send myself to Camp Tippecanoe. A neighborhood friend and I built a three-hole mini-golf course and charged kids to play. I ran a very lucrative illegal firecracker business. When I turned 13, things changed.

It took seven years but my father's determination to earn a living selling insurance finally paid off. The first thing that happened was Dad quit selling shoes. We moved to a bigger house. We got a new family car. And the kitchen became a much less tense place. Dad was now at the head of a very successful life insurance business, Sirak Financial Services, which he had built from

scratch. Eventually, I joined my father in the family business. In one of our conversations, he mentioned that certain members in the community had helped him to survive in the early years when he struggled to make a living. Who they were and what they did are still a mystery to me. But because of their generosity, my dad became a very charitable person, helping others as he had been helped. **"Be the one in the room who wants to help people," was my father's advice.** It is some of the best advice I've ever been given.

And, that is why I am a member of the Alexis De Tocqueville Society and support the work that United Way does in our community.

# PROSPERITY@WORK

In August of 2020, United Way of Greater Stark County launched Prosperity@Work and currently has four partners - Aultman Health Foundation, Gervasi Destinations, H-P Products, and MK Morse.

Prosperity@Work offers a sustainable workforce model to the workplace. This one-on-one benefit is uniquely dedicated to improving employee engagement while providing resource connection to help remove barriers that may prevent employees' advancement.

The program collaborates with the employer to offer solution-driven services, work supports, and financial stability opportunities for employees. These services in combination with human resources, management practices, policies, and benefits can lead to a stabilized workforce.

At the core of Prosperity@Work is the innovative concept of providing an onsite support member, a Resource Connector, who cultivates relationships with

employees. Through a confidential assessment, the Resource Connector provides connections to services addressing unique barriers and provides support and follow up for employees to make career-minded choices. The services not only help employees gain economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families, but also help employers retain an engaged and skilled workforce.

*"I believe that if you can eliminate obstacles, all you have to do is concentrate on your job. The Human Resources Department staff are not social workers; we don't understand what the requirements are to access services or what people truly need. United Way is helping H-P be a leader in the marketplace by helping our employees overcome personal barriers to be more successful and engaged at work."*

Susan Tubbs, Human Resources Manager at H-P Products, Inc.

## MELEAH NELSON Update



United Way of Greater Stark County's Young Leaders Society (YLS) is a group of passionate young professionals who come together to educate, engage, and inspire individuals across Greater Stark County. Recognizing that college textbooks are a necessary, but costly, expense that is not typically covered by academic scholarships, YLS helps ease that burden for high school students through the textbook scholarship fund.

Meleah Nelson graduated from Timken Early College High School in 2018 and was one of two recipients of the YLS Textbook Scholarship that year. In the Spring of 2021, Meleah sent the following email to United Way of Greater Stark County:

"I wanted to let you know that I am graduating this spring semester from Youngstown State University with my Bachelor of Arts - my major was Psychology and minor was Criminal Justice. I wanted to thank you and the scholarship committee for your support throughout my college experience. I have endured many challenges and adversities, especially with the pandemic in which we all had great hurdles to overcome. However, because of you and the committee's support, it has helped me in many ways to push through, and I sincerely wanted to thank you for this."

Meleah is currently a Registered Behavior Technician working with children ages 3-11 with autism. She is also applying to masters programs and, because she achieved her undergraduate degree in three years, her textbook scholarship from YLS will extend into her first semester(s) of graduate school.

Out of nearly 6200 employees with access to Prosperity@Work in their workplace, over 4480 were assisted by United Way Resource Connectors

### TOP EMPLOYEE NEEDS



Mental Health



Taxes



Transportation



Utility Assistance



Food



Childcare



# UNITED WAY OF GREATER STARK COUNTY'S CENTENNIAL

In 2022, United Way will have been serving the needs of the greater Stark County community for 100 years. During this time, our commitment has not wavered, and as times have changed and needs have become more complex, we have evolved in how we address community needs. As we prepare to embark on our next 100 years, we know that to be successful, we must adapt, become even more strategic, and take bold action.

Communities are made up of people, and the simple fact is that too many in Stark County are struggling. As we look forward and consider how we protect Stark's future, we are driven even more to do the hard work. We are determined to mobilize the caring power of this community to join us in providing solutions to the most difficult challenges we face. To say that poverty is difficult and complex would be an understatement. It has many causes and is widespread across Stark County. Although daunting, this is far from a hopeless situation. Through our work, we provide hope.

Getting to the root cause of poverty starts at home. It starts with understanding where people come from, addressing disparities, and strengthening neighborhoods. We must disrupt the vicious cycle of

disinvestment and displacement that negatively impacts the vitality of communities comprised mostly of families with low incomes, or even no incomes.

We invite you to join our Centennial Celebration and continue on the journey with us. While this milestone is worthy of celebration, our work addressing poverty is at the forefront. To honor our history and future in this community, we are launching the **Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families** initiative. With this new programming, we will take United Way services directly into neighborhoods in our community to connect families to resources and guide them onto a path of financial stability and success.

We believe the future of Stark County's neighborhoods depends on our collective efforts to transcend the limitations of the popular imagination.

Together we will consider what is possible if we invest in the beauty of forgotten places, the value of the people who live there, and seize the opportunity to realize our shared vision for an equitable and inclusive society. We are committed to making this vision a reality and we hope you will join us.



**We have plans for commemorating 100 years of United Way in Stark County.**

Visit [uwstark.org/100](http://uwstark.org/100) for the latest information on all the ways we are celebrating throughout the communities we serve.

**Events and activities to date:**

- **Stone Soup** - In early February, volunteers created meals to support local food distribution efforts.
- **KidzArt submissions** - Local school children submitted drawings depicting their vision of kindness.
- **Centennial Sculpture** - A commissioned work of public art is in the making and will be revealed to the public in May.
- **Uniting in 100 Ways for 100 Days Calendar** - simple activities you can do to join in our celebration (Visit web site above for details.)

## **The Red Feather -**

In the early years of United Way, when it was known as Community Chest, the red feather was adopted as a symbol of the generous giving throughout the community. For our Centennial Celebration, we have included the red feather both as a salute to our past and as an acknowledgement of the spirit of generosity that has continued for 100 years and drives our mission of improving the quality of life throughout our community.



## Alexis de Tocqueville Society

The Alexis de Tocqueville Society was established by United Way Worldwide in 1984 as a movement to celebrate and recognize individuals investing in their community with gifts of \$10,000 and more.

Since 1996, United Way of Greater Stark County's Alexis de Tocqueville Society members have been the leaders in our community in improving the lives of countless families through extraordinary financial gifts, volunteerism, and advocacy. Or local Society members join a national network of 420 Alexis de Tocqueville Societies and more than 25,000 philanthropic leaders committed to



**Members: Susan and Johnny Sirpilla, Laura Grabowsky, Cricket Boyd, and Bob DeHoff**

creating opportunities for everyone in their local communities.

**To date, there are 83 members locally, who have invested more than \$1.3 million in United Way's**

**2021 Campaign to raise the quality of living for all of us in Greater Stark County. Our community thanks you.**

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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With gratitude for the time, effort, and expertise they give, we acknowledge our volunteer Board members.

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**Thank you to our partners: DEHOFF REALTORS®**, for donating the professional design work. We are always thankful for all you do for our community.

# ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR

We invite you to join in the many opportunities to get involved throughout the community this year!

**MAR.  
29th**

## Annual Celebration:

Join us as we recognize outstanding volunteers and workplaces and celebrate the support of our community.



*2021 Gold Key Service Award recipient, Teresa Purses*

**APRIL  
TBD**

## Virtual Education Series:

Learn about challenges our community faces and the work that United Way is doing.

**APRIL  
5th**

## Retirement Celebration:

Gervasi Vineyard - 5:30-7:30pm  
Watch your mailbox for an invitation to this event celebrating Maria Heege's retirement after 41 years of service to United Way.

**APRIL  
TBD**

## Meet the New CEO:

This is a great opportunity to learn more about United Way of Greater Stark County's new CEO, Angela Perisic.

**MAY  
13th**

## Day of Caring:

County-wide volunteer opportunities to support our neighborhoods and make a large impact. [uwstark.org/day-of-caring](http://uwstark.org/day-of-caring)



*Volunteers from Employers Health assisted with Day of Caring 2021*

**Various  
Dates**

## Pop-Up Donation Drives:

Watch for these "spontaneous" donation sites in the Alliance, Canton, and Massillon areas. As part of our Centennial commemoration, we will be collecting needed items for donation to local programs and agencies. Visit [uwstark.org/100](http://uwstark.org/100) or watch our social media for updates on exact dates, locations and items being collected.