

United Way stresses need

By Rolf Boone

OLYMPIA - United Way of Thurston County officials said Tuesday that with economy slowing down, fundraising for the nonprofit agency is even more important.

This year's goal is to raise \$1.4 million for the organization, up from \$1.35 million last year, United Way Executive Director Pam Toal said.

A fundraising campaign ends March 31, she said.

To help reach its goals, United Way took a new approach Tuesday by organizing a breakfast for about 50 Thurston County business leaders at the Phoenix Inn in downtown Olympia.

Rather than meet with all of them individually, which can be a challenge, United Way decided to share fundraising information with them as a group, Toal said.

"We're concerned," she said about the economy, "but we also know that people in our community step up."

Increased need

Toal cited the following statistics from various agencies as evidence of the increased need for United Way services:

The number of Thurston County Food Bank customers has increased 30 percent.

Of the 2,500 Thurston County children who started kindergarten this month, 34 percent come from low-income families.

Thurston County has nearly 800 homeless residents.

"We need to step up," said John Winn Miller, the 2008 United Way of Thurston County campaign chairman and publisher of The Olympian. "Now is not the time to retreat; now is the time to test your mettle."

After the breakfast, Toal said that United Way of Thurston County funding supports 35 agencies in the county, including Boys & Girls Clubs in Lacey, Tumwater and Rochester.

Speaker Lynnette Avery told the audience that the Boys & Girls Clubs serve an important function.

Seven years ago, Avery sought help from the organization to escape an abusive relationship, she said.

Today, the single mother of two children works for the organization, and demand for its services continues to grow, Avery said.

Last year, the clubs served 1,600 children, she said.

"It provided a sense of stability in our lives at a difficult time," Avery said about her first experience at the clubs.

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About United Way

To donate to United Way of Thurston County or for more information about the agency, call Pam Toal at 360-943-2773, ext. 10, or go to www.unitedway-thurston.org.