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Ellen K. Annala
United Way of Central Indiana



IN GOOD COMPANY

A poster, hanging in the offices of United Way of Central Indiana, depicts the uniforms of four professions—scrubs for a medical doctor, jumpsuit for an astronaut, dress blues for a police officer and protective slicker for a firefighter. The caption states the obvious: “Before students can wear these, they have to wear these...” A second illustration shows a cap and gown.

A longtime sponsor of education initiatives,

United Way of Central Indiana (UWCI) recently launched a program so ambitious that its success depends to a great extent on the support and participation of the Indianapolis business community. Piloted in September 2006, revamped and rolled out in October 2007, ReadUP asks corporations to allow employees time off during the work week to tutor fourth-graders whose reading skills are below average. Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) enthusiastically endorsed the concept, and a call for the hands-on involvement of corporations and their workforces prompted a response that far exceeded the goal. More than 500 tutors, including three chief executive officers, stepped up and signed on.

“Everything about a wonderful community starts with education,” says Jan Diggins, president of the Central Indiana Corporate Volunteer Council, manager of community redevelopment at Citizens Gas & Coke Utility and one of 59 Citizens Gas employees serving as tutors at IPS School 14. “Every aspect of this program resonated with me.”

Part of a comprehensive initiative called “Ready to Learn/Ready to Earn,” ReadUP is one of many UWCI programs to emerge from the unique

collaboration that exists among central Indiana’s business sector, its philanthropic partners and community-based organizations. “This was a very attractive volunteer opportunity for companies because our school system represents our future,” says Angie Kolman, director of UWCI’s volunteer center. “Here was a chance for corporations to give back to the IPS system and at the same time realize a return on the investment.”

Diggins and her colleagues agree. They see ReadUP as a win-win program that benefits not only students but also employers who depend on the community to supply the future workforce. “Businesses have to have qualified employees,” says Diggins. “They can do a lot of on-the-job training for specific and technical jobs, but they can’t teach workers to read.” Fourth grade is pivotal to the effort because, as she explains: “At that point students make the transition from learning to read to reading to learn.”

Tom Morton, one of 20 ProLiance Energy employees who tutor at IPS School 106, adds that his company sees this program as “an investment in the future of Indianapolis and central Indiana as a whole. For Indianapolis to succeed and prosper, it must have a successful school system.”



CREATING MOMENTUM

Ellen K. Annala, president and CEO of UWCI, uses body language to articulate the interdependence of a robust marketplace and a thriving community. Making a circular motion with her right hand, she indicates the growth cycle that begins when a community attracts economic development. This economic development initially creates jobs and then, once successful, pours resources into the environment that further enhance the area's appeal.

The result of the business sector's contributions is a region so rich with social opportunity and cultural amenities that it invites and stimulates additional economic development. The growth cycle perpetuates as the robust business sector and the thriving community work together to create the energy that fuels the momentum. "The vitality of this community is dependent on a lot of factors," says Annala. "And a strong marketplace that invests in human services, education and the arts is certainly one of them." This year more than 1,200 businesses in six counties composed the "strong marketplace" that enabled

UWCI to meet the \$39 million goal of its 2007 fund-raising campaign.

Although the number of participating businesses has remained fairly constant, many changes have occurred within that number. Corporate decisions to merge, consolidate, downsize and relocate their operations have contributed to shifts in UWCI's funding base, a phenomenon that is neither unique to Indianapolis nor to Indiana. These decisions mean that those large, consistently supportive companies are critical to the success of the campaign. The loss of even one of them must be made up by contributions from several smaller companies. In 2007 a dozen companies contributed 48 percent of the \$39 million amount raised. For example, the workplace campaign of Eli Lilly and Co., by far the largest company campaign, raised more than \$9.1 million, which represented 23 percent of the total funds raised in the entire campaign.

CHANGING CORPORATE COMMUNITY

"This phenomenon is happening not just in our community," emphasizes Annala. "When an area becomes more of a 'branch city,' organizations such as United Way have to engage people in different ways. Corporate decision-makers aren't always on-site saying, 'This is a good thing to support.' Developing a strong sense of community is a challenge because some companies have employees just passing through and moving on. Thirty years ago we probably took for granted the fact that everybody participated in United Way. We can't do that anymore because of two factors: The marketplace has changed, and more nonprofit organizations are competing for dollars and volunteers."

In response to these dual factors, UWCI “retooled” several years ago in an effort to raise funds more strategically and to step up its interaction with corporate supporters. A Lilly Endowment grant helped the organization expand its annual workplace campaign and create marketing and development departments that encourage major gifts and planned giving.

Another Endowment grant supported a study to learn the business sector’s changing expectations of United Way. In short, what kinds of services might UWCI offer that would help its corporate sponsors be more successful? Four adult leadership-training programs and dozens of volunteer opportunities were introduced so employees could feel connected to the community and assume active leadership roles in it.

“We’ve become an organization that isn’t just trying to meet community needs but one that understands the needs of companies,” says Annala. “We take into consideration what the companies are trying to achieve. For example, if a business wants to do something through volunteerism to build camaraderie within its workforce, we can help it do that. We’re very focused on the community, but we also are very focused on our companies.”

FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Supported in part by a \$550,000 Endowment grant, “Ready to Learn/Ready to Earn” serves both interests. At a UWCI retreat two years ago, board members recognized that the human service needs of the community were escalating and the best way to meet those needs was to address the root causes. The board pored over research that showed education as a key to reducing poverty, crime and unemployment.

Members learned that students who are successful in the early grades tend to stay in school and graduate from high school. They are more likely to move on to higher education. Data showed a direct correlation between education levels and income potential. “If we have citizens who are able to earn livable wages, our community is more effective and has to spend less money fixing problems,” explains Jay Geshay, UWCI senior vice president.

With input from IPS and major financial support from Eli Lilly and Co., “Ready to Learn/Ready to Earn” and ReadUP, its tutoring component, took shape.

ReadUP tutors are currently involved with 250 fourth-graders in 15 elementary schools. Each student is matched with a tutor and receives half an hour of instruction three times a week with the volunteers. The program’s progress in bringing participants’ reading skills up to grade level is being measured by standardized tests, and preliminary results are encouraging.

“Our students were tested before we started tutoring and then were retested after several weeks,” reports Diggins. “Every one of them increased in reading fluency and proficiency. Some of the kids just needed one-on-one attention and needed to hear an adult say, ‘Yes, you can do it.’”

Even before achieving quantifiable results, ReadUP has had positive, intangible effects that are impossible to quantify. Among them, the program has exposed children to role models involved in professions unfamiliar to most of them. As students develop relationships with tutors who are engineers, pharmacists and computer scientists, they see the link

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OPPOSITE, L TO R

Jay Geshay, UWCI senior vice president, gets the attention of youngsters at a day care session at Kingsley United Church of Christ in Indianapolis. Children gather around Greta Turnage and Sandy Fowler, volunteers from Redcats USA, for a little reading time at the East 10th United Methodist Children and Youth Center. The central Indiana business community has responded eagerly to United Way initiatives. **ABOVE** IPS School 14 bustles on the afternoons when the ReadUP tutors arrive from Citizens Gas. Among them is Dawn Evans-Casey, a Citizens Gas employee who offers some reading guidance to Marvin McKnight.





Charlene Gibson at IPS School 14 reads with the encouragement of Monica Kapp from Citizens Gas. The ReadUP program—part of United Way’s “Ready to Learn/Ready to Earn” initiative—has enlisted 250 fourth-graders in 15 elementary schools.

in the robust bioscience technology sector that we have here in central Indiana,” says Annala. “We’re considering a tutoring program in science and math.” This would translate into more opportunities for companies to supply more volunteers who, in turn, would have more influence on the community’s future. As Annala concludes, “It all works together.”

between education and rewarding careers—although they may not fully comprehend job descriptions and responsibilities.

Employees at Citizens Gas like to tease Chief Executive Officer Carey Lykins about his initial encounter with Marvin McKnight, the student he was assigned to tutor at IPS School 14. Somehow Marvin learned Lykins’ title. Although he didn’t understand its scope, he knew it meant something special. “Wow!” said Marvin. “Are you really the boss of a whole gas station?”

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

At many schools, the tutoring sessions have led to deeper involvements on the part of the participating businesses. One company treats all fourth-graders to a day at the Indianapolis Children’s Museum; another sponsors fund-raising events to buy games and extra clothing for the children. It’s common for tutors to feel such ownership in the program that they boast about “my” student’s progress and refer to the company’s assigned school as “our” school. “We’ve told school officials that if the students get as much out of the program as the tutors do, it can’t help but be successful,” says Morton of ProLiance Energy. “The relationship between our company and ‘our’ school continues to develop.”

If test results confirm ReadUP’s success, UWCI eventually may expand the program beyond reading and into other academic disciplines. “We’re hearing that kids aren’t coming out of school prepared for jobs

John C. Lechleiter, Eli Lilly and Co. president and CEO and UWCI board member, echoes Annala’s sentiments. He is proud of the financial and volunteer support UWCI receives each year from the company’s employees. Of the 530 volunteer tutors in the ReadUP program, nearly 350 are Lilly employees.

“We all want to live in a community that cares about the quality of life of all its residents, and we recognize our future success is dependent on our ability to find educated, prepared employees,” says Lechleiter. “There must be an array of excellent educational opportunities in our community for Eli Lilly and Co. and other businesses to thrive. So Lilly is pleased with UWCI’s focus on improving the education outcomes of some of our most vulnerable children and youth so that they will be prepared for future prosperity.”