

ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT



NEWS

United Way sets \$800,000 fundraising goal

September 10, 2026
By John Flowers

MIDDLEBURY —The United Way of Addison County (UWAC) last year for the first time eclipsed the \$1 million mark in annual fundraising in support of local nonprofits.

It was indeed a banner year and a testament to area residents looking out for their neighbors who are struggling with bills, illnesses, mental health issues, hunger, substance use disorder, homelessness and the other challenges of trying to get by with meager resources.

The record \$1,011,585 harvest in 2025 has given UWAC leaders the confidence to set a 2026 goal of \$800,000, up \$15,000 compared to last year's smashed target of \$785,000.

While the stock market has continued to be on the upswing, United Way officials realize not everyone is heavily invested. At the same time, those in need have been hit especially hard by inflation, and by soaring gas and grocery prices. UWAC officials wanted to be conservative in their 2026 fundraising goal, not knowing what the economy might have in store for this fall and early next year.

Erin Reed, UWAC's development & marketing director, pointed to a spike in large, anonymous individual donations and business contributions — including one of \$75,000 and several others topping \$10,000 — as being key to the organization beating its 2025 goal by \$225,000.

There's no guarantee the 2026 campaign will realize the same number of big donations, so Reed and her colleagues have been looking at multi-year trends.

“Our development committee, which is made up of United Way staff and board members, felt \$800,000 was a decent goal to set, given the continued donations we've been seeing year after year from our loyal donors,” Reed said.

“The needs in the community continue to be great, and the community's strong response to our campaign has allowed us to increase how much we're able to award each year. And that's huge,” she added.

Helena Van Voorst, UWAC's executive director, is also keeping the 2025 campaign harvest in perspective.

“As inspiring as this (\$1 million) milestone is, it also reflects an important reality: the needs in our community continue to grow. More families are struggling to afford housing, childcare, food, transportation and other basic necessities,” Van Voorst said in a message attached to United Way's **25-26 annual report**. “Local nonprofits are seeing increased demand for services while facing rising costs and uncertain funding. Every day, people in our community are working hard but still finding it difficult to make ends meet.”

President Donald Trump's “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” — signed into law signed on July 4, 2025, with support in the Republican-controlled Congress —during the next 10 years will substantially reduce funding for Medicaid, Medicare, the Affordable Care Act; impose new requirements for SNAP recipients; and decrease federal support for student loan services and energy assistance programs.

At the same time, that law mandates tax breaks in 2027 that are expected to net the average family earning less than \$50,000 around \$250 in tax cuts in 2027, while the average tax filer earning \$1 million or more a year will receive more than \$100,000 in tax breaks, according to the **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**.

It's math that's expected to add up to more service calls to Addison County nonprofits, 43 of which are partnered with UWAC. This year United Way welcomed seven new nonprofit partners, all with an education thrust: Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, Rokeby Museum, Commodore Club, Middlebury Music Center, Town Hall Theater and the Common Ground Center.

UWAC maintains six categories of giving: Under \$1,000; “leadership” at \$1,000 to \$1,249; Robert Frost at \$1,250-\$2,499; Robert Frost “silver” at \$2,500-\$4,999; Robert Frost “gold” at \$5,000-\$7,499; Robert Frost “platinum” at \$7,500-\$9,999; and Tocqueville — \$10,000 or more.

Donors can also give through UWAC's “**365 Business Circle**,” payroll deduction, stock gifts and other ways.

More than 20 folks were able to contribute at the Tocqueville level last year, according to Reed.

“We also see donors who are able to move up in categories,” she said. “Our board is very involved in helping us steward those donors and making connections to them. It's a true team effort, in terms of getting our message out, letting people know the work our funded partners are doing.”

DAYS OF CARING

If you're keen on donating some time and elbow grease, you have a prime opportunity later this month to see — and help —some of the county's nonprofits. UWAC on Sept. 17 & 19 will hold its annual “**Days of Caring**,” during which an estimated 300 volunteers will spend time assisting organizations like the Otter Creek Child Center, Helping Overcome Poverty's Effects, Rokeby Museum and Middlebury Area Land Trust.

Days of caring helpers will assist with jobs ranging from painting fences to landscaping. It's a yearly chance for folks to not only help nonprofits check off their to-do lists, but also to learn more about the county's safety net.

Area employers are always good about releasing workers to participate in one or both Days of Caring. And Middlebury College has annually dispatched entire student sports teams to lighten the load for nonprofits in need.

Amy Hoekstra, UWAC's community impact manager, links volunteers to nonprofits for the Days of Caring. She marveled at the way the experience gives to all involved.

“With a lot of students being from out of state and coming to Middlebury, it's an excellent way for them to get to know our community. And our community accepts them with a warm hug and excitement,” Hoekstra said.

Van Voorst recounted one of her favorite Days of Caring stories.

She reflected back to 2020, when UWAC launched “Addison County Responds,” a special program designed to help people whose lives were being upended by the COVID pandemic. United Way received a \$5,000 check from an out-of-state person for the new “Responds” fund. UWAC officials called the donor to thank her and ask the reason or her gift.

“It was the mom of the captain of the men's lacrosse team, which had volunteered for Days of Caring. When COVID hit and their season was canceled, they remembered their time volunteering with us and decided to use their travel fund to make a contribution back to our community,” Van Voorst said.

That magnanimous gesture, according to Van Voorst, epitomizes why UWAC faithfully maintains its Days of Caring.

There's still time to register for the Days of Caring. Contact Hoekstra at 802-388-7189 or at amyh@unitedwayaddisoncounty.org.

To donate to UWAC's 2026 campaign, go to unitedwayaddisoncounty.org/give.

Reporter John Flowers is at johnf@addisonindependent.com.

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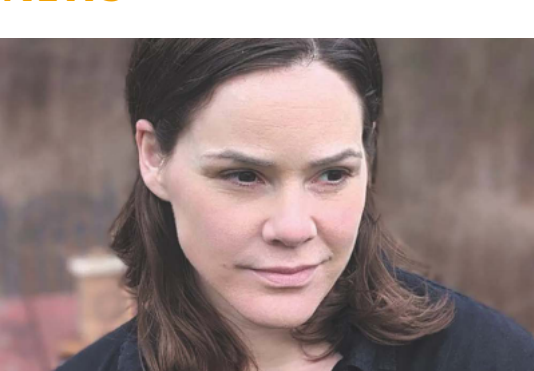
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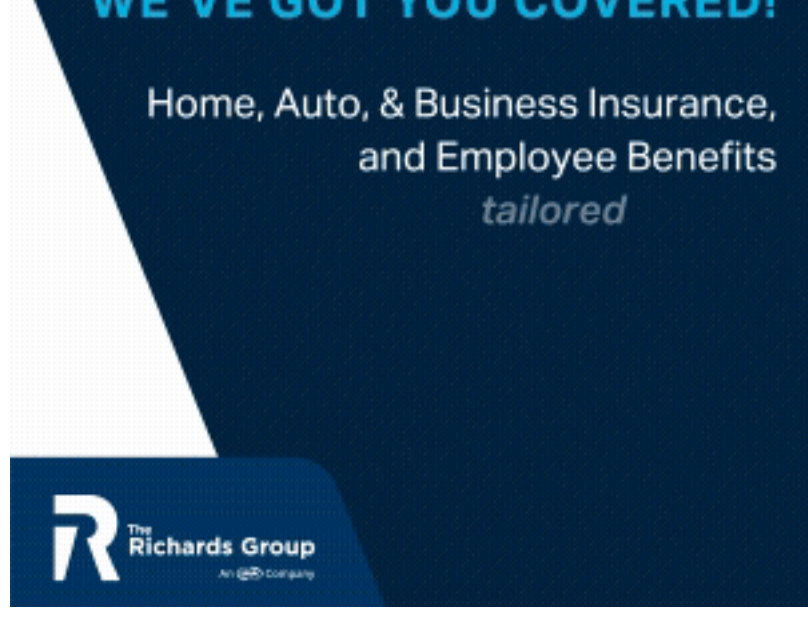
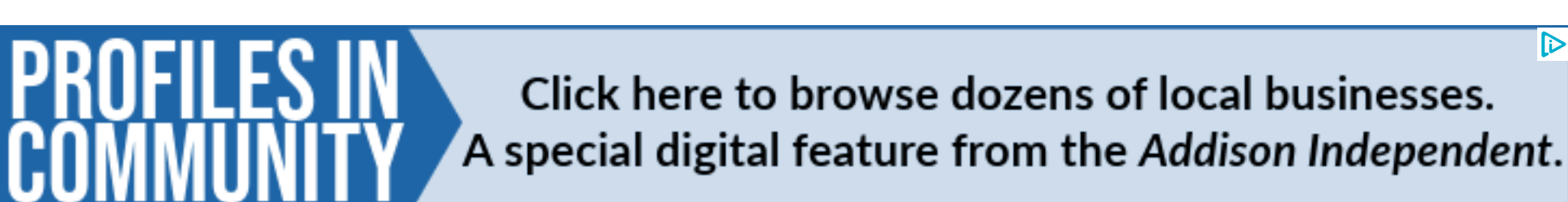
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