

**GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.
LIVE UNITED.**

MERRILL AREA UNITED WAY, INC.

FOUNDED OCTOBER 27, 1947

2024 ANNUAL REPORT
(Presented February 2025)



MERRILL AREA UNITED WAY, INC.

2024 – A YEAR OF ONGOING CHANGE!

Several changes presented themselves for the Merrill Area United Way this past year and will continue to evolve in the coming year.

- Compared to the last decade, fund development recently has not been on a slow steady increase, but rather a bit of a pendulum for the past two years. Ongoing efforts will be required to return to financial upswings.
 - United Way Worldwide is engaged in rolling out a Global Re-branding that will be reflected in every aspect of United Way initiatives and our local operations as well. UWWW wants messaging that demonstrates we are “United in Purpose”. A few Board members are engaged in the cohort training sessions. The changes will be phased in with updating several materials by July of 2025 and a full transition by September of 2028.
 - Locally, we have remained true to our impact areas of income/basic needs, health and education. United Way Worldwide, by definition, has rebranded the initiatives to be 1) financial security, 2) healthy community, 3) youth opportunities, and 4) community resiliency. Overtime, these will allow for a much more in-depth, broader brushstroke of what United Ways can help with.
- In the coming year, the community will see a shift from our current logo to new visual identities, new images, logo, slogan, etc. and more United Way uniformity in our messaging.
 - In line with many of the changes coming forth, United Way established a new Marketing Committee to look at improved marketing efforts, both traditional and increasing the use of technology. The newer marketing efforts will be directed through that committee, led by Leah Burbach.
 - In 2024, the Merrill Area United Way continued to hold a single fund-raiser. We brought in the incredible Leslie Blasing from South Padre Island, Texas for her final northern United States tour. However, this year the proceeds were not directed to the United Way fund, but rather the Disaster Relief Fund (established in 2013) to increase help for fire victims. As we concluded 2024, a one-time gift, including the event dollars of \$5,489 and the United Way Disaster Relief Fund money in the amount of \$8,243.50, for a total of **\$13,732.50** was transferred to the Merrill Fire Fighters Foundation to continue helping fire victims.
 - One thing remains steadfast, our funded United Way agencies are faced with high demands for services, and they rely heavily on funding through United Way. United Way provides an invaluable service by securing funding, but we also ensure the funds are used to meet the needs of the community. Our Board of Directors take their fiduciary responsibilities seriously. We work with the agencies, receive updates on progress, make personal visits and then show our appreciation at an annual picnic to thank them for all the hard work they carry out.
 - By garnering financial support from a very giving, civic-minded, and caring community, we can help thousands of people who struggle with life’s challenges. Under the United Way umbrella, about 20 agencies are supported each year.

2024 – A YEAR OF ONGOING CHANGE!
CONTINUED

- 2024 we contracted with a recognized web-design company, specializing in United Way websites. We went live with our new site this past summer. In 2025, there will be additional modifications to become compliant with the new United Way Worldwide re-brand requirements.
- Then, another significant change is on the horizon as organizational leadership changes. Executive Director, Dee Olsen submitted her letter of resignation effective May 2, 2025, as her retirement date. The Board established a Search Committee to begin work to find a new Executive Director so that training can be done, and the organization can transition the position in a timely manner.
- Critical to the leadership and the success of Merrill Area United Way is the Board of Directors. Fortunately, MAUW has a very strong and dedicated Board with longevity. In 2025, five new eager and interested Board members will be seated at the Annual Meeting.

2024 IMPACT

Total community **impact allocations** to 20 funded agencies with disbursements to those affiliates was \$211,500. In addition, funds to other outside agencies from the community fund, direct designations and 2-1-1 services brought the total amount granted to \$218,390. The allocations to all our funded agencies are granted toward programs in the three major impact areas. Duly noted, the total Community Fund *budgeted* = \$7,000 and total spent = \$6,500.

The United Way Disaster Relief Fund was transferred to the Merrill Fire Fighters Foundation for assistance to help fire victims. We will continue to maintain the account with a minimal balance, in case a disaster should arise.

- In compliance with United Way Worldwide’s programming preferences, our local United Way focuses on three major Impact Areas: Health, Education and Basic Needs/Income.
- Board continued to support the expenditure of \$6,000 for 2-1-1 Call Center to service Lincoln County for 2024. This call center provides key information and is the major referral resource system for all Lincoln County residents.
- United Way supports Lincoln County Health Department initiatives and other community organizations promoting countywide health as identified in the 2023-2028 Lincoln County Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan. The Plan focuses on 3 areas; 1) Promote Mental Health and Emotional Well-being; 2) Support Healthy Lifestyles; and 3) Bolster Community Centered Resources for the 55 Plus Population.
- Always looking to the future, continuous improvement, and organizational development, the Board of Directors engaged in a planning session in April facilitated by Laura Huggins. The Board reviewed overall annual progress and detailed steps attributed to five overall goals. The 2024-2025 goals are:
 - *Establish committee to determine plan of action for Marketing Plan.*
 - *Make decision on Disaster Relief Fund.*
 - *Review policies and succession plan.*
 - *Establish approach for fundraising*
 - *Host Coffee & Chat among board members.*

Throughout 2024 the Board and the committees have been engaged in this goal area and are making progress.

- Through our United Way Community Fund we gave financial support for Christmas gifts to Pinecrest residents; we also supported delivery of 2 tons of potatoes plus cabbage to five area food pantries and HAVEN; helped with the church-coordinated summer lunch program for children who need lunches; *Free Talks AODA program for teenagers*, sponsored by Lincoln County Healthy Minds; and recently donated

2024 IMPACT CONTINUED

Money toward the impactful message for youths through the Great Speakers' Forum; supported the 2-1-1 Help Line; the Merrill Forward Together Backpack program and a few other local needs. All this was sponsored by our Community Fund.

- Thanks to Corporate sponsors, the Concert for a Cause, fundraiser, featuring the talented Leslie Blasing from South Padre Island, TX was successful. Over \$5,000 was raised.
- Maintaining our Facebook/website is ongoing.
- We now offer Stripe on our website as an option for donors/donations. Pay Pal is still available too.
- Allocation Teams met in fall. The teams reviewed mid-year progress of all impact programs and evaluated the 19 submitted agency allocation applications for 2025 funding.
- Almost monthly articles are placed in the Foto News. Media releases, speaking engagements and media interviews were done throughout the year. In addition, our message is heard with our regular monthly WJMT Radio Program, "Our Town" on the last Monday of the month. It features United Way activities and highlights our funded agencies.
- Working with our agencies as they manage through changes in their organization is helpful to them.
- We provided information at our Gazebo Nights "Pop-Up Party" in August.
- United Way funded agencies participated in the mid-year reports demonstrating how their services impact their clients because of dollars provided by United Way. These reports serve as a mid-year benchmark defining their success of having achieved true impact. We are told frequently about the significance United Way dollars are to the ongoing needs of our agencies and their programs.
- Merrill Area United Way has complied with all United Way Worldwide compliance measures, filing all necessary documents and vigorous reporting. These included the annual Membership Certification and Data Base II reports. ***United Way Worldwide has annually acknowledged and credentialed our organization for meeting the standards of excellence.***
- In 2024, the United Way 2023 finances were audited by Gassner Co., SC CPA's. MAUW met with acceptable accounting standards. All appropriate federal and state tax reporting and payments were completed.
- Additionally, the Board assures us that all appropriate insurance policies are carried out by the organization.
- Full oversight of all related employee records, tax reporting and filings are also accounted for.
- The Wisconsin Department of Finance Annual Report and Wisconsin Form 1952, and other State Credentials reports were also filed.
- Campaign leader – Church Mutual Insurance raised \$161,088, other campaigns were conducted by Wisconsin Public Service, Harley Davidson, Associated Bank, City of Merrill, Nationwide, United Health Group, Pieper Electric, Associated Bank, Nicolet National Bank, Park City Credit Union, Opportunity Development Center, and BMO. Compared to last year, individual and retiree giving was down slightly.
- Given the many uncertainties of our economy, high inflation, life changes, job stability, and other outside influences, the efforts for our annual campaign were impacted this year through additional outreach. However, the impact reflected a decline in overall giving. Changes at Church Mutual have influenced the campaign outcome also. Not knowing what to anticipate, MAUW closed 2024 below our goal.
- Campaign work is imperative to our success and includes Company/Employee campaigns, individual and retiree giving aided by our annual mailer to every household/business to help boost donations.

2024 OPERATIONS CONTINUED

- United Way participated in several programs and events including Lincoln County Childcare Coalition, Lincoln County Economic Development Summit (presenters), Lincoln County Health Care, United Way WI roundtables, Central WI United Way Directors meetings, Merrill Food Pantry Appreciation Event, Nicolet Bank’s “Soups On” fundraiser, Optimists meetings and events, CMIC CEO luncheon with Alan Ogilvie, Little Lakes Memories event, VFW events, and several Chamber of Commerce events and Business networking programs.

2024 AGENCY INFORMATION

- United Way funds programs that impact people’s health, education; and meeting their basic needs of food, shelter, electricity, and heat. Each agency/program brings important, necessary services to our local people in need. *Here is a brief glimpse of a few services:*
EDUCATION: Parkside Preschool Center, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Merrill Boys & Girls Club, Merrill Safety Patrol, Family Resource Center, and Childcaring, Inc.
HEALTH: Bridge Health Clinic (counseling services for AODA and mental health).
INCOME - BASIC NEEDS: St. Vincent De Paul Outreach, Merrill Community Food Pantry, North Central Community Action Program, Merrill Community Homeless Center (MAC Home), HAVEN, Salvation Army, Our Sisters House, BlueJay Nests and Christmas Spirit Appeal.
- Healthy Minds for Lincoln County is now handled by the Lincoln County Health Department and continues to work to support healthy choices for youth regarding alcohol, drugs, and vaping and the effects these vices have on social and emotional well-being of teens and others.
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters has two Merrill programs, school-based and community-based. They match adults and/or high school students (bigs) with

younger kids (littles) to give them a reliable person to talk to, interact with, and do special activities with. Also, Bigs with Badges, matches police and fire department officers with kids.

- Food For Kids provided supplemental meals when none are available at home. Meals are given to eligible children to be taken home. The numbers are staggering of how many children need this program.
- The Merrill Community Food Pantry provides food to help supplement families and individuals who are struggling to make ends meet. Approximately 5,000 people are fed during the course of a year. Incredible!
- HAVEN provides a wide range of services, including shelter, to individuals and families affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. HAVEN can house up to 24 individuals in 6 rooms. HAVEN serves an estimated 300 people a year, including children.
- St. Vincent De Paul, North Central CAP and Salvation Army all provide services to assist with rental issues, utility shutoffs, basic needs, furniture, gas cards, etc. etc. to help people in dire straits. Invaluable!
- Since opening in 2019, MAC Home, Merrill’s homeless center, has now provided over 7,500 safe stay nights for clients – impacting over 500 people, including children. With trained staff on premises 24/7/365 days, they counsel and guide clients toward independent living.
- MAUW also funds Our Sister Place, Tomahawk, another homeless shelter.
- Both homeless shelters open for 24 hours in adverse weather, either extreme hot or cold.
- ***So many dedicated agencies; 1,000’s of successful stories!***

2024 APPRECIATION

- Thanks to the “Concert for a Cause” planning committee for a great event featuring Leslie Blasing in August of 2024 in support of the Disaster Relief Fund. Also, to the VFW Post 1638 for hosting the event at their beautiful facility.
- The Salvation Army provided a wonderful picnic meal at the September Board – Agency Appreciation Picnic.

2024 APPRECIATION CONTINUED

- United Way gives a heartfelt Thank You to Reindl Printing for assisting MAUW with our printing, marketing and campaign pieces.
- WJMT BlueJay 730 AM Radio Station and Merrill Foto News have been wonderful media partners and fully support our ongoing work and messages.
- Special thanks to Pat Burg and Joe Breaman II for maintaining and managing our social media, i.e. website and Facebook.

UNITED WAY'S MISSION AND PURPOSE!

“To mobilize our community so the health, welfare, and education needs of all people are met with the ultimate goal being to improve their quality of life.”

A HUGE DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO ALL UNITED WAY DONORS!

MAUW’s success depends on the financial support provided by our civic-minded community members, and our generous participating companies, who support United Way with their employee campaigns and annual donations. For each donor whether an individual, retired person, employee, or corporate gift – we are so very grateful.

The Merrill Area United Way Board of Directors continues to seek improvements for the organization to better meet the needs of the Merrill community and our area people. The Board of Directors deserves a debt of gratitude for their ongoing work and dedicated service. The Board members are exemplary stewards of the funds provided and ensure great accountability. The ongoing development of investment resources to support the funded agencies is imperative.

2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Stacy Stevens, President
Joe Breaman II, First Vice President
David Johnson, Second Vice President
Mike Ravn, Immediate Past President
Jane Dehnel, Secretary
Brian Richards, Treasurer
Maria Brickner
Leah Burbach
Laura Forester
Lin Kautza
Becca Klessig
Mandi Klockow
Jamie Koch
Nancy Kwiesielewicz
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Kurt Rust
Susan Ryman
Janet Schreiber
Tom Zentner
Mark Zulliger
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