

United Way borrows services of

Agency program helps organize fundraising

BY ANDREA V. HERNANDEZ
Staff Writer

28 executives

They have the quantity, and now it's time to focus on the quality.

In its 29th year, United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley is borrowing 28 employees from various local companies to help with its annual campaign -- still with the same drive, but this time with more manpower.

Each year, local businesses and organizations "loan" one or a few of their executives for the United Way Loaned Executive Program. The 15-week part-time program trains executives to manage workplace donation efforts as part of its annual campaign, which benefits United Way's 22 agencies and 59 programs. The 28 volunteers this year are the most number of participants in the program's history.

"The loaned executives; they more than quadruple our efforts of being visible in the workplace and helping to coordinate the campaigns," said Lisa Deason, senior director for marketing, communications and operations at United Way.

This year, three out of the 20 participating companies are loaning executives for the first time -- Litho-Krome Company, Chattahoochee Valley Community College and Rob Doll Nissan -- and almost all of the loaned executives are fresh faces, said Deason, who remembers there being three participants in the program when she started working for United Way 20 years ago. Each executive is assigned a number of companies, including their own, to help solicit and coordinate donation efforts. Last year, the program's 16 participants handled about 20 accounts each. With almost double the number of loaned executives this year, each loaned executive will now handle 10 companies, at most.

Velma Bright, a key account manager at Georgia Power who volunteered for the program for the second straight year, said this will allow volunteers "to give more individual time to each account."

"It's a worthwhile organization and I'm not a rich person, but I love working in the community," said Bright, 50 who has worked for Georgia Power for 23 years. "So I volunteer my time."

Training provided

Through the program, loaned executives, who began training last week and are committed until November 30, get a chance to develop their skills in public speaking, customer service and leadership as well as gain a greater familiarity of the community.

"The program has a lot of learning opportunities for these individuals," Deason said. "They can learn from it, not only in their personal life but they can carry that back to their companies."

On Tuesday, 25 of the 28 loaned executives toured the Stewart Community Home in Columbus, which helps mentally ill and physically disabled adults transition to independent living. The Stewart Community Home was one of the 10 local United Way agencies -- from the American Red Cross of Russell County to Easter Seals -- the loaned executives visited last week.

The tour gave the volunteers the chance to see who their efforts would benefit.

"I've been a one-percent-giver for many years," said William Kent, environmental compliance manager at Columbus Water Works. "But I've never seen how the money was used or how the money was raised."

Jann McMahan, site manager and senior vice president at TSYS Acquiring Solutions, a subsidiary of TSYS, said the program allowed her, a longtime Columbus resident, the opportunity to get involved in the community.

"If you don't have the exposure to it, I don't think you can talk sincerely about it and do this job," McMahan said.

For some participants, their duties as loaned executives are similar to what they do on a daily basis at work. For example, Bright handles accounts for 34 large commercial and industrial Georgia Power customers exclusively.

"I'm actually their single point of contact for them, all their needs. I'm their resource," she said. "I like to think, with United Way, that I will be another set of hands and their resource."

Program worth it

Jennifer St. John, director of workplace and leadership giving at United Way, said the time commitment from the last few years has been about 7 1/2 hours per account.

"Everybody has deadlines and projects they do," Kent said. "It can be a little challenging, but it can be done."

Most of the time, participating companies are flexible with their loaned executives, Deason said. At Georgia Power, Bright is allowed time to work on the campaign. "I think it's more than worth it," Bright said. "It speaks well of our community to be able to allow employees from these various employers to volunteer."

On Thursday, after the loaned executives delivered their mock presentations, Bright said she was more comfortable with presenting in front of a crowd.

"I've always been told that if you really want to know about your topic and learn your information, the best tool is to teach it," Bright said.

For McMahan, the challenge was taking in all the information about United Way, its agencies and programs.

"It's learning about all of that and being very, very versed in it so that when somebody asks you a question, you have an answer for it; that's the hardest part," she said.

Her experience as a loaned executive has gotten her to consider continuing volunteering after the program ends -- perhaps working with children or feeding the homeless.

"I can try to assist United Way in a successful campaign to get the funds they need, and then it goes beyond that," she said.

Over the past 10 years, United Way has raised more than \$57 million through its annual campaign. Last year, United Way raised a record-breaking \$6,361,430, surpassing that year's goal of \$6 million. This year's goal will be announced at its kickoff on Sept. 7 at the Columbus Georgia Convention and Trade Center.

For more information or to donate online, visit www.unitedwayofthecv.org.

EXECUTIVES ON LOAN

Litho-Krome Company, **Keith Johnson**-b **Aflac**, f+b**Tamara Christopher**

Aflac, **Ed Brinkman**-b **Blue Cross/Blue Shield Georgia**, f+b**Barbara Archie**

CB&T, **Mario Davis**

CB&T, **Colleen Sauer**-b **Chattahoochee Valley Community College**, f+b**Varonika Hamilton**-b **City of Phenix City Parks & Recreation**,f+b **Carol Walls**-b **Columbus Consolidated Government**,f+b **Lynette Gross**-b **Columbus Consolidated Government**, f+b**Annette Gibney**

Columbus Consolidated Government, **Linda Pierce**-b **Columbus Regional Healthcare System, Inc.**, f+b**David Abney**-b **Columbus State University**, **Columbus Technical College**, f+b**Kathy Gilmore**

Columbus Water Works, **William Kent**-b **Columbus Water Works**, f+b**Sam Sears**-b **Georgia Power Company**,f+b **Velma Bright**-b **MCSD**, f+b**Barbara Mottis**

PCI, **Barbara Borchert**

Pratt & Whitney, **Tana McHale**

Rob Doll Nissan, **Dennis Bailey**

SunTrust, **Melanie Perry**

Synovus, **Greg Hudgison**

Synovus, **Cy Harrison**

TSYS Acquiring Solutions, **Jann McMahan**

Rob Doll Nissan, **Howard Tibbitt**

TSYS, **Darlene Baird**

TSYS, TBA

Contact *Andrea V. Hernandez* at 706-571-8586 or ahernandez@ledger-enquirer.com