

United Way Drive Opens With a Laugh *by Ray Scherer*

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A comedian's antics and the high jinks of its own members helped the United Way of Greater St. Joseph kick off an already-spirited 2001 campaign Thursday morning.

Joel Zeff - a Dallas-based speaker, actor and writer - motivated more than 300 United Way members by demonstrating that fun, passion and creativity can fuel the campaign.

"We can't take things so seriously all the time," Mr. Zeff told United Way agencies during a kickoff breakfast at the Ramada Inn, 4016 Frederick Blvd.

Mr. Zeff energized the audience with a version of the children's game "Simon says." He led the exercises and skits to illustrate teamwork and attitude in the United Way's annual fund-raising campaign, which continues through early November. Barrages of laughter met each skit as members fumblingly sought to follow specific instructions as role players. One of the games required participants to act either as puppets or puppeteers. The group successfully mimicked the jobs of a surgical team performing an operation.

"They did a fantastic job. That game's about teamwork. They had a role, a responsibility," Mr. Zeff said. "We were all dependent on each other. Everybody had a chance to be a leader. It's better when everyone's involved. That's the whole point."

Another activity employed members' charade-playing abilities to highlight communications.

"It's very easy to misunderstand," Mr. Zeff said of how fundamental communication is to organizations. "We have to be more 50-50. We have to be more involved."

The laugh-laden presentations spilled over into enthusiasm from this year's pacesetter companies. United Way campaign chairwoman Dale Boulware said the 12 companies have already combined for \$578,812, or 19 percent, of this year's \$3,071,000 campaign goal. The total represents a 7 percent increase over last year's initial pace, she said. "With a slowdown in the economy, we know we face challenges," Mrs. Boulware said of the campaign. "If we just stay positive and stick together, we can do it." She referred to the campaign's slogan - "Stick Together, United we're better" - which features cookie cutter-like figures linked at the arms.

Mrs. Boulware introduced Brad and Ruth Phillips and their 4-year-old daughter, Madeline Phillips, who celebrated her birthday at the breakfast. She said Madeline has received therapy from Children's Mercy Hospital, United Cerebral Palsy of Northwest Missouri and the YWCA for a head malady and orthopedic problems.

The Missouri Western State College Pep Band performed at the breakfast. The first United Way progress lunch is set for 11:45 a.m. Sept. 20 at the Mayes Memorial Armory, 301 N. Woodbine Road. Volunteers with the Midland Empire chapter of the American Red Cross will prepare the meal, demonstrating the organization's new mobile kitchen.

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