

# UPDATES

Issue 2, 2021

## CEO CHATS, OR “THE DUNN-DURKIN DIALOGUES”

By Susan B. Dunn

One of the best things about retirement for me is getting to work again with all of my favorite United Way professionals – active and retired!

This year I am serving as Program Chair on the UWRA Board. In addition to increased programming for UWRA members, a key area of focus has been bringing current and former CEOs together to share our successes and challenges in leading a local United Way. Whether we gather for a one-time discussion during our CEO Chats or for several one-hour sessions over a few weeks in our CEO Circles, there is productive idea-sharing and empathy for one another.



As one participant in our CEO discussions said, “Part of United Way’s strength is learning from each other, and it can be hard to find those opportunities.”

With support from UWRA, United Way CEOs have opportunities to talk about what is on their minds and learn from each other in a safe, supportive environment. Our participants have ranged from execs with only a few months of experience to those with many years in the United Way network. They represent smaller, rural communities as well as

## 80% OF FFTC ANNIVERSARY CHALLENGE GRANT MET

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of UWRA’s Endowment, the Foundation For The Carolinas (FFTC) has agreed to match, dollar for dollar, up to a total of \$10,000 of irrevocable, lifetime gifts received into the UWRA Endowment during 2021 and 2022. Generous contributions from Lead Contributors (see page 10) have already raised more than \$8,000 towards our goal and are expected to exceed \$10,000 a full year ahead of schedule.

Please help us double your impact by making an endowment contribution toward the challenge grant. Your gift sustains UWRA’s programs and services and honors the United Way system that provided lasting friendships and incredible life experiences that made a difference in the communities you served.

Visit [https://www.uwra.org/endowment\\_contribution.html#/](https://www.uwra.org/endowment_contribution.html#/) for more information and to make a contribution. We are grateful for your generous support! ■

large metropolitan areas. Everyone’s perspective adds value. We all have something to learn and share.

Michael Durkin, former CEO of United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, and I have been guiding the CEO Circles this year – hence, the moniker “the Dunn-Durkin Dialogues!” It is an understatement to say that Mike and I have a deeper respect and appreciation for current network leaders after their year of dealing with COVID and the racial inequity issues brought to the forefront due to the murder of George Floyd.

With support from UWRA, United Way CEOs have opportunities to talk about what is on their minds and learn from each other in a safe, supportive environment.

One particular CEO Chat stands out to me. A newer CEO of a larger United Way talked about a grant they were awarded to partner within their community and make change on issues that mattered, while not forgetting the value of United Way’s role in workplace fundraising. His energy, insight, innovation, and optimism for the United Way network to change how we do business was inspirational to me.

Consider joining us for a future conversation! Email [info@uwra.org](mailto:info@uwra.org) to learn more. ■

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# GREETINGS TO UWRA MEMBERS!

From Susan Gilmore (Board Chair, UWRA) and  
Amber Kelleher (President & CEO, UWRA)



We can feel momentum in the air  
at UWRA. Progress surrounds us,  
and it is encouraging.

**W**e can feel momentum in the air at UWRA. Progress surrounds us, and it is encouraging.

After years of thoughtful preparation and extensive strategic planning, UWRA is embarking on a branding journey that is both essential and energizing for the association.

UWRA Board members Deborah Bayle, Susan Dunn, and Barbara Edmond have been instrumental in outlining our plan and selecting our brand consultant. We are also most fortunate and grateful to have Cynthia Round, former Executive Vice President of Brand Strategy and Marketing for United Way Worldwide (UWW), as another partner in this process. Cynthia is leading a Brand Audit, which involves gathering additional insights and impressions through 1:1 interviews with members. We extend our sincere thanks to those of you who spoke with Cynthia. Your contributions are clarifying our future direction. Members of the UWRA Board will make some important decisions at our Board meeting on September 20 & 21.

There is momentum at United Way Worldwide, too. UWW Chief of Staff Brian Lachance led a candid “state of the network” conversation at a recent Town Hall for UWRA members. Brian summarized his remarks in his article on page 4. Mark your calendar for our next Town Hall with UWW on October 6th.

There is momentum in Washington state under the leadership of “change agent” Dona Ponepinto, President and CEO for United Way of Pierce County, whom we are honored to feature in this issue’s CEO Spotlight (page 5).

There is momentum in the north where the newly amalgamated United Way British Columbia (UWBC) and its portfolio of Healthy Aging programs are providing important non-medical services to keep older adults Active, Connected, and Engaged (page 6).

UWRA Member Jatrice Martel Gaiter understands momentum as someone who was frequently a “first and only” throughout her life and career. We are delighted to (re)introduce Jatrice in our Member Spotlight (page 8).

Finally, we are incredibly grateful for the momentum provided by the support of our loyal members. Many of you stepped forward as Lead Contributors for our foundation match grant, putting our goal well within reach (page 10). And even more of you stepped up this year to contribute as Leadership members (page 11). Your gifts sustain UWRA’s programs and services and honor the United Way network that provided lasting friendships and life-changing experiences in the communities you served.

**With gratitude,  
Susan and Amber**

*P.S. Did you see the long list of people who are already signed up to attend our UWRA Gathering on September 21-25 in Louisville, KY (page 3)? The Gathering is a great way to see friends, eat terrific food, and experience local hospitality. We hope to see you there! ■*

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Kyong Suk Aagesen (Woodbridge, VA)

Beth Burkes (Wilmington, NC)

Amy Corron (Houston, TX)

Kymn Davidson-Hamley (Christiansburg, VA)

Debra Gittens (Washington, DC)

Chris Herndon (Cary, NC)

Traci Jadlos (North Royalton, OH)

Steve Kast (Yorktown, VA)

Marc Levy (Fort Wayne, IN)

Karen Macier (Auburn, NY)

Maureen Noe (Indianapolis, IN)

Hugh Parry (Wilmette, IL)

Heather Sedlacko (Gibsonia, PA)

Jayanti Shukla (Mumbai, India)

Kerri Strauss (Athens, PA)

Margit Szekeres (Alexandria, VA)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

UWRA Events are a great way to stay connected to your colleagues and the United Way network. Events are open to current UWRA members.

Visit [www.uwra.org](http://www.uwra.org) to register and receive access information.

## MEMBER MEETUPS

**September 7, October 5, November 2 at 4pm ET**

Part educational and part social, these online discussions (re)connect UWRA members with new friends and former colleagues. Each month, one of your fellow members will briefly present a personal passion or reveal a lesser known talent. The remainder of the hour is open discussion.

## HISTORY HANGOUTS

**September 15, October 20 at 3pm ET**

History Hangouts are an opportunity for current and former United Way colleagues to come together to reminisce and recollect different aspects of United Way history. Themed calls are held on the third Wednesday of each month by Dick Aft, United Way Historian and UWRA Emeritus Board Member.

## UWRA OVERVIEW FOR NEW(ER) MEMBERS

**August 25, October 7 at 3pm ET**

(Re)connect with fellow UWRA members, discover the benefits of your membership, and learn about the important work UWRA is leading. Content is aimed at new(er) members, but the overview is open to all members.

## UWRA ANNUAL GATHERING

**September 21-25, Louisville, KY**

Gather with United Way colleagues and friends and experience the highlights of Derby City. Refer to the preliminary itinerary on this page.

## INTERIM EXECUTIVES ACADEMY

**October 3 - November 21**

UWRA is partnering with the Third Sector Company to offer an Interim Executives Academy, which includes 16 hours of immersion training on interim leadership over an 8-week period. Academy participants will discover the strategic nature of transitional leadership and learn how to negotiate the interim engagement. Email [info@uwra.org](mailto:info@uwra.org) to request more information.

## UWRA TOWN HALL WITH UNITED WAY WORLDWIDE (UWW)

**October 6 at 11:30am ET**

Interested in hearing what's happening across the United Way network? Brian Lachance, UWW Chief of Staff and liaison to UWRA, hosts regular Town Halls for UWRA members. Join the conversation, hear candid insights about network challenges and opportunities, and catch up with your former colleagues.

## AGING WELL

**November - December 2021**

Drawing upon content from the National Council on Aging (NCOA) playbook for aging well, groups of 10-12 UWRA members meet over an eight-week period and experience a fun and interactive approach to positive aging by focusing on key aspects of health, finances, relationships, personal growth, and community involvement. The next cohort is forming now. Email [info@uwra.org](mailto:info@uwra.org) for more information.

REGISTRATION IS OPEN!

UWRA  
ANNUAL  
GATHERING

JOIN US  
IN LOUISVILLE -  
SEPTEMBER 21-25, 2021

Our hosts, Joe and Terry Tolan, are thrilled to show you the highlights of Derby City.

### Tuesday, September 21

Meet and greet participants during our Welcome Happy Hour.

### Wednesday, September 22

Take a 90-minute private Trolley Tour. Explore one or two of Louisville's premier museums (e.g., Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory or the Speed Art Museum). Then, get a real taste of Kentucky in the Bourbon district as we tour the Evan Williams Distillery.

### Thursday, September 23

Cruise the Ohio River and enjoy spectacular views of downtown Louisville from a riverboat. Join an optional group tour of the Muhammad Ali Center Thursday afternoon.

### Friday, September 24

On your mark. Get set. We're off to the races! Learn about the history of Thoroughbred racing, Churchill Downs, and the Kentucky Derby at the Kentucky Derby Museum, followed by a thrilling afternoon of live racing at Churchill Downs Racetrack.

### Saturday, September 25

Depart for home.

Make reservations now at the new **Galt House Hotel**. Room rates are incredibly affordable for this riverfront hotel. Contact UWRA for the group reservation link or call 502-589-5200, ext 5181 and mention the Group Code: **092121UNIT**.

**UWRA Members  
planning to  
attend the  
Gathering, as  
of publication:**

Dick Aft  
Michael Brennan  
Carol Burger  
Sarah Caruso  
Viney Chandler  
Susan Dunn  
Mike Durkin  
Barbara Edmond  
Bob Ferriday  
Roger Frick  
Susan Gilmore  
Rich Grigos  
Robert Hines  
Janet Jackson  
Ed John  
Gary Johnson  
Janet Jokisch  
Tish McCutchen  
Bill Mills  
Judy Quinlan  
Rob Reifsnnyder  
Sandy Rupp  
Lauren Segal  
Alice Thacker  
Joe Tolan  
Terry Tolan  
Joyce Wilbur  
Carl Zapora



## UPDATE FROM UNITED WAY WORLDWIDE

By Brian Lachance, UWW Chief of Staff and Liaison to UWRA

I enjoyed seeing a number of longtime friends during the June 30th Town Hall for UWRA members. I look forward to our next time together on October 6th and encourage all of you to participate in the live dialogue. In the meantime, here is a bit of what's happening at United Way Worldwide (UWW).

We are now in our fifth month working with Interim President and CEO Neeraj Mehta. During his time, Neeraj has stayed focused on stabilizing the brand, the network, and our culture.

### Toward Stabilizing the Brand...

We are nearly at the half-way point of our LIVE UNITED Initiative, a spring and summer online campaign (see below). You may have heard that NFL star Russell Wilson and his wife Ciara agreed to serve as co-chairs. They join a number of our United Way ambassadors and influencers in helping to push out information about the good work United Way is doing in communities around the world.

Russell and Ciara have been generous with their time and talent, recording a heartfelt video to launch the initiative and amplify our content across their social media channels. To date, we've generated more than 2 million impressions across United Way Worldwide social media platforms, including content that spotlights the transformative work going on in local United Ways.

### Toward Stabilizing the Network...

Listening, listening, and more listening. Neeraj has engaged United Way leaders through dozens of one-on-one meetings with Board Chairs and CEOs, and dozens more in-network and small group meetings, including the Council of States and the Major Market Forum. What he and others have heard informs the work of two task forces, which have been established to set a new path forward.

### Toward Stabilizing our Culture...

The two task forces – one to consider our business strategy (including network governance) and the other to consider our culture – are now up and running. Both task forces include representation from local United Way leaders, Board members, and UWW staff. Their aim is to create critical new frames for the future of United Way. The Board is relying on these task forces to bring forward their best recommendations for strengthening our network models and suggestions on how we make decisions together.

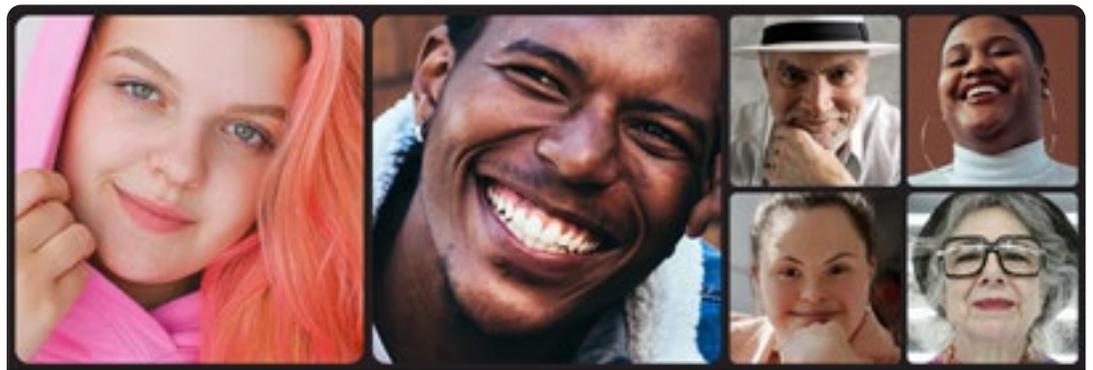
The work of the Business Strategy and Culture Task Forces will be instrumental in laying the foundation for the next UWW CEO. The Executive Search Committee continues to work apace. They have finalized the position description and recruitment materials, and the search is underway. We'll share more information as it progresses.

In the meantime, I hope you are all enjoying a safe, healthy, and joyful summer. ■

## WHAT IS THE LIVE UNITED INITIATIVE?

The LIVE UNITED Initiative is an eight-week effort to highlight the vital work United Way is doing in 40 countries.

It allows the network to unify around our brand, our common message, and a common digital engagement experience for existing and prospective donors. It will help all of us Live United, raise funds, and support communities, as a complement to local campaigns. ■



# Ready to LIVE UNITED



To learn more, visit  
[www.unitedway.org/get-involved/LIVE-UNITED-Initiative](http://www.unitedway.org/get-involved/LIVE-UNITED-Initiative)



# MEET DONA PONEPINTO CEO AND “AGENT OF CHANGE” OF UNITED WAY OF PIERCE COUNTY



**D**ona Ponepinto, President and CEO of United Way of Pierce County in Tacoma, WA, has a steady, decades-long history of service to United Way. But, perhaps surprisingly, the most consistent theme you’ll find in her lengthy experience is anything but consistency. Ask anyone who knows Dona, and they’ll tell you that she’s not afraid of change.

“Part of what I’ve done throughout my United Way career, and something I’m probably most proud of, is being a change agent,” Dona says. “Even when I started out with United Way in California more than 30 years ago and things were still somewhat traditional, we were learning how to move in a different direction. Learning about how to better bring communities and partners along to be part of change.”

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Dona’s accomplishments showcase how her go-getter, community-focused attitude can generate change on a large scale and in record time. Most recently, she’s worked with partners across Pierce County to pursue a goal of lifting 15,000 households out of poverty by 2028. To date, through their investments in the community, over 4,300 families have moved towards self-sufficiency. Additionally, she has helped shift the organization’s funding structures to focus more on grants and local workplace contributions – something that was especially important during the pandemic. Part of United Way of Pierce County’s success stems from a shift in perspective, Dona says.

“It can’t just be about the money,” she says. “We think of ourselves as an organization that is committed to a cause, and that has helped us look at our work differently. Any money we raise and anything we do is based on our aspiration to help bring families out of poverty.”

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*It’s about giving people a hand up, not just a hand out.*

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“The transformation of this United Way has been fun to be a part of. It’s where I get my energy,” says Dona. Her energy is contagious, and has inspired staff and partners to get on board with projects such as UWPC’s Center for Strong Families initiative, a project that started in 2016 and has served more than 3,500 families in the area. Funded by more than 15 partners and working in collaboration with organizations like Goodwill, Sound Outreach, Bethel School District, Clover Park Technical College, Tacoma Community House, and the Tacoma Housing Authority, UWPC has opened seven centers to support families as they become more self-sufficient, increase their income, decrease expenses, build credit, and acquire assets.

“It’s about giving people a hand up, not just a hand out,” she says.

UWPC’s South Sound 211 call center team, a group that Dona calls a “robust engine to help people navigate through challenges,” helps support the cause. The 211 program connected more than 10,000 people to shelter and rental assistance in 2020, and distributed more than 5,000 masks during the pandemic. The group has grown to include 19 staff members who provide valuable input for Dona and her team.

“I’ve always been a believer that community buy-in is essential for success,” Dona says. “The more people you can get

involved in a project, the better. One of my favorite sayings is, ‘make sure that people are in on it and up on it.’ The phrase comes from a volunteer I worked with in Detroit.”

Dona served as Vice President of Community Investments for United Way for Southeastern Michigan from 2006 to 2013, a position she was hesitant at first to apply for after living in Southern California for almost 18 years, but proved to be “one of the most fun and challenging roles” she’s ever taken on. During her time in Detroit, she embraced her role as an agent of change and helped the organization reimagine how they invested in communities while also honoring the rich history of the area. Before working in Detroit, Dona spent more than 15 years in California working for Orange County’s United Way and United Way of Greater Los Angeles. In fact, her relationship with United Way stems back even further to when she was a child watching her parents support United Way.

“My mother actually helped start the First Call for Help, a precursor to the 211 program at the United Way in Beaufort, South Carolina,” Dona says proudly. “My parents gave to United Way for more than 20 years. I guess you could say United Way has always been in my blood.”

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With deep roots in the organization and a strong vision for the future, it’s no surprise that Dona’s time with United Way has been such a positive experience for herself and the many partners she has worked with.

“This isn’t just my career, it’s my vocation,” she says. “And I’ve enjoyed every minute of it.” ■

# SPOTLIGHTING SUCCESS IN THE NETWORK

## HEALTHY AGING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

This feature story is an extension of UWRA's Aging in Place research conducted in 2019, funded by a grant from the Cinda A. Hallman Memorial Fund, which addresses two of the recommendations made by UWRA:

- 1) Amplify United Way's commitments to older adults, and
- 2) Drive knowledge sharing across the United Way network.

UWRA is excited to spotlight United Way British Columbia (UWBC) and its portfolio of Healthy Aging programs.



By Kahir Lalji, Provincial Director of Healthy Aging by United Way, United Way British Columbia

Have you ever noticed that media stories about seniors tend to reduce this large and very diverse group of individuals into a single demographic category? Whatever issue is being discussed, the news report or magazine article typically assumes it impacts all seniors equally, as if older adults are one giant, indistinct group – which, of course, they aren't!

What's the picture that comes to mind when you think about "seniors"? For me, there is no single image because seniors are a lot of different things. Many are actively engaged in the world around them, making valuable contributions to their communities as they grow older. Some are outgoing whereas others are a bit more laid back in how they go about things. They are much loved members of their families – mothers, aunts, grandfathers, brothers. Many are recent immigrants; some are indigenous to this land. Some celebrate Ramadan, while others observe Passover. There are those who participate in Black History Month and those who take part in Pride festivities. The point is – seniors are a mixed bag. They are a lot like everyone else, just older.

That said, there are very real challenges associated with aging. As our bodies and minds grow older, our strength and acuity naturally begin to fade – but this doesn't happen to everyone in

the same way or at the same rate. Many people remain healthy, strong, and vibrant as they grow older, while others become increasingly frail over time. There are a lot of reasons for this decline, both genetic and environmental, with a lot of socio-economic factors in the mix. It's this set of circumstances we focus on when United Way Healthy Aging develops resources and supports for people as they age.

United Way British Columbia (UWBC) manages a portfolio of Healthy Aging programs that provide important non-medical services to older adults, which help them live at home longer, remain physically active, stay connected to friends, and remain engaged in their communities. Active, Connected, and Engaged: that's our mantra. There are currently six different programs in the United Way Healthy Aging portfolio, all of which are delivered locally by community-based service agencies. This amazing network of service agencies is the life force of United Way Healthy Aging.

When the pandemic took hold early in 2020, we were asked to take on a leadership role in the Government of British Columbia's **Safe Seniors, Strong Communities** (SSSC), an emergency COVID-19 response initiative. We immediately enlisted our Healthy Aging network, and everyone pulled together to help older adults living at home stay safe and connected during the pandemic. **Better at Home** program providers were a huge part of the SSSC effort. They were joined by other program providers from the Healthy Aging network, as well as agencies from the broader community-based seniors' serving sector. We are so grateful for the amazing community service workers and for the thousands of volunteers who stepped up this past year to provide ongoing support and services to older adults in need throughout the province.

And while 2020 was by no means a normal year, we were able to hold the course and meet many of our long-term strategic objectives, like expanding the number of Better at Home programs available in British Columbia (imagine being a non-profit community agency and starting up a new program during a global pandemic – talk about neighborhood heroes!). There are now 81 community agencies delivering Better at Home services throughout British Columbia, with more to come in 2021.

Active, Connected, and Engaged:  
that's our mantra.

We also stuck to our schedule and launched two brand-new programs, as planned, earlier this year (the Navigation & Peer Support program and Digital Literacy pilot project), and we'll kick off a new Men Sheds program this fall. As I write this, United Way Healthy Aging funds 127 volunteer-driven, non-profit agencies who deliver some 195 Healthy Aging programs in communities across BC. The work of strengthening connections and supporting seniors continues, even as the COVID crisis subsides, because the need for these kinds of services will continue. Helping people stay active, healthy, and engaged as they age is Healthy Aging's reason for being, and we are proud of the part we play in strengthening connections that support seniors in need in local communities. ■

*Kahir Lalji is the Provincial Director of Healthy Aging by United Way – a department of the newly amalgamated United Way British Columbia (UWBC). Kahir holds a Master Degree in Gerontology from Simon Fraser University and serves on the Board of HelpAge Canada, BC211, and Destination Imagination.*

To learn more visit the Healthy Aging webpage, or contact [healthyaging@uwbc.ca](mailto:healthyaging@uwbc.ca).





## DISCOVERING WHAT'S NEXT!

On June 3rd, UWRA hosted a lively webinar with second-career expert and retirement coach Nancy Collamer. The conversation included many key points that are applicable to all UWRA members, regardless of their career stage.

Nancy explained that retirement is different from other transitional milestones. She urged those who are still working, but nearing the end of their work life, to reflect on how they want to spend their days. Additionally, she reinforced a message that UWRA strongly believes in: no matter where you are in your retirement journey, it's never too late – or too early! – to connect with and contribute to your community.

Nancy offered practical advice that starts with keeping a retirement journal with answers to questions such as:

- **What will you miss about work?**
- **What are you ready to leave behind?**
- **What energizes you?**

She also recommended experimenting through volunteering or project work to help identify or refresh your retirement plan. By starting small and starting early, you can help set yourself up for success when your transition comes.

Nancy provided the acronym **P-A-S-S-I-O-N** as a self-evaluation tool for those unsure about what they want to do when they reach retirement.

**P** **People** - Who are the people you want to be around or serve?

**A** **Activity** - What kind of activity do you want to be engaged in?

**S** **Skills** - What are your skills?

**S** **Strength** - What are your strengths?

**I** **Interest** - What are you curious about?

**O** **Opportunity** - What is the opportunity?

**N** **Need** - Is there a need?



Nancy Collamer,  
Author and Career Coach

### MORE INFORMATION

Check out these resources recommended during the webinar:

- **SideHusl.com** and **Encore.org** (for those seeking to extend their income-producing lives);
- **Coursera.org** and **GetSetUp.io** (to satisfy intellectual curiosity);
- **RoadScholar.org** (for those looking to learn and travel).

This webinar was recorded. Contact [info@uwra.org](mailto:info@uwra.org) to request access. ■

## CHRISTINA LAWRENCE: MAKING CONNECTIONS FOR UWRA



Christina Lawrence is a familiar name to many UWRA members. She is UWRA's Membership Associate, and the caring person behind so many of the messages you receive from UWRA.

Christina has played a key role in connecting

members since joining UWRA over a year ago. Her extroverted personality and extraordinary affinity for detail are a perfect match for her role, which includes tasks such as meticulously managing members' records and processing all membership payments. Christina openly admits she can't leave anything "half-updated." UWRA President and CEO Amber Kelleher remarked, "Christina's conscientious attention to detail, compassion for members, and strong organizational skills have proven invaluable to the association."

Christina finds it particularly rewarding to put a face to the name of a member she has been communicating with over time. She looks forward to meeting many members in person when she attends the UWRA Gathering this September in Louisville (see page 3 for details about the UWRA Gathering).

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As the spouse of a career Navy officer, Christina sees strong similarities between the bonds formed among those who maintain lifelong connections through their branch of service and those who remain connected through service to United Way Worldwide.

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As the spouse of a career Navy officer, Christina sees strong similarities between the bonds formed among those who maintain lifelong connections through their branch of service and those who remain connected through service to United Way Worldwide.

When not at the office, Christina is a culinarian who enjoys making connections in her kitchen, cooking and baking a little bit of everything. She often samples new dishes at restaurants – with an eye toward replicating them at home.

Thank you, Christina, for all the little things you do that make a big difference for UWRA! ■



# SPOTLIGHT ON JATRICE MARTEL GAITER

## A UWRA MEMBER UPDATE

By Jatrice Martel Gaiter

United Way experiences made an indelible impression on how I navigated and framed my entire career. I worked at United Way of Central Indiana, Miami Dade-County, and the national office in Alexandria. My passion for building stronger influence and visibility for human services in public policy and my tenacity to withstand the challenges of being the “first and only” were formulated and sharpened.

During the nascent years of nonprofit engagement with national public policy, I worked on the ground floor as Director of Federal Government Relations. Jack Moskowitz headed the national United Way government relations department that consisted of three people. In recent years, the department has had up to nine employees.

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One of the distinguishing features of my United Way experience was the training, teaching, and learning.

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We wrote the first government relations handbook for local Boards and staff, taught classes at the National Academy of Volunteerism (NAV), and executed the first UW Capitol Hill Day while I worked at the national office. Our first job was to convince local Boards and CEOs that government relations was an integral part of their mission.

My career has gone full circle. One of my most intriguing experiences at the national office was working on the 1986 Tax Reform Act.

Nonprofits wanted a charitable deduction for non-itemizers. In my current role as Executive Vice President for External Affairs at Volunteers of America, I worked with several coalitions to make changes more favorable to charitable giving in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act enacted in late 2017.

One of the distinguishing features of my United Way experience was the training, teaching, and learning. I was included in a program designed for staff members of color who were on the CEO track. It taught us how to interview with multiple Board members rather than just one person.

We were filmed and critiqued and supported after the class concluded. Even today, I often value colleagues with United Way experience because I find that they understand how to staff Boards and committees, and appreciate the nuances of community leadership. Today at Volunteers of America, our CEO, Mike King, is a former staff member from the United Way of Dallas. Our Senior Vice President of Development, Tom Waters, previously worked at United Way Worldwide.

After twelve years at three United Ways, I furthered my career as a Vice President of an urban education think tank at Michigan State University, Executive Director of an international children’s agency (SOS Children’s Villages), and the CEO of Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington.

Throughout my life, I have often been a “first and only” – the first and only African American and/or woman in my class, my position, or my organization. I am the daughter of an Army colonel and a teacher. I was born, attended school, and worked for an international child welfare agency based in Germany. I have lived in thirteen places in my life. Often being the “first and only” brought excruciatingly painful episodes of racism, sexism, and exclusion at work. Being a leader is lonely. Being a Black woman leader can be isolating and disconsolate.

Among my more colorful experiences at United Way, a co-worker was asked to stop his Klan mail from coming to the office. An executive had a Black man crawl under the table and shine his shoes during an executive staff meeting.

And there were Board members interested in courting. My life was threatened on Haitian radio after I completed an assignment to stop a Miami agency from blatant political activity in Haiti. While such incendiary behavior is rarely displayed today, our country and the nonprofits we lead still have a complicated journey ahead of us toward equity, diversity, and inclusion.

I am proud of my role in several United Way projects. In Indianapolis, we established the first battered women shelter that was partially funded by a new divorce filing fee. I worked in Miami at the height of the crack epidemic. The devastation to families was horrific.

We worked with family court judges to pass legislation that would keep children from languishing in foster care and speed up family reunification or adoption.

Along my journey, I built a strong group of friends and advisors. I am still close friends with many of the people I met along my United Way path.

Balance and perspective were achieved through active roles in local and professional organizations and world travel. I was an officer of the founding National Board of the Coalition of 100 Black Women and Chapter President in Indianapolis and later in Washington D.C. While at United Way of America,

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Even today, I often value colleagues with United Way experience because I find that they understand how to staff Boards and committees, and appreciate the nuances of community leadership.

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I was on the Board of Women in Government Relations. I have served on several nonprofit Boards. The MetroStage theater Board is currently my most exciting. My travels have taken me to several countries including Morocco, New Zealand, and Iceland. I will have visited all seven continents after my 2023 trip to Antarctica.

By the way, I live across the street from the UWW headquarters. ■

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## Meg Baxter (Cape Elizabeth, ME)

My nonprofit career has spanned five decades. My 38 years with United Way culminated with 20 years as President and CEO of United Way of Greater Portland (ME), retiring in 2010. I gave myself a year off before preparing for what I called my “encore career.” I knew my next role would be somewhere in nonprofits, and I knew I would stay in Maine. In 2011, I accepted the role of President and CEO of the Mitchell Institute, founded by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell. We award a \$10,000 scholarship to a graduate of every high school in Maine. We offer a suite of programs and other financial supports to our Scholars throughout their post-secondary careers. That support matters. We have a graduation rate of 90% versus a national average of 58%.

My work at United Way taught me that one path to equity is a solid education. It can be a great equalizer no matter what your economic or social background. As a first-generation college graduate, I know how lucky I was to have had the support needed to succeed.

It is also exciting to focus on a single sector after the multi-faceted nature of my work with United Way. I feel like I am in the right place and doing the right thing. That said, I’m retiring at the end of the year – for good! I will be volunteering at my grandsons’ elementary school and Hospice of Maine.

In my spare time, I enjoy spending time with my dog, Meadow, and traveling with a lifelong friend. I’m an avid reader, cribbage player, Red Sox and New England Patriots fan, and a crossword puzzle enthusiast. As our state slogan says: Maine: the way life should be! ■

## Jack Costello (Phoenix, AZ)

I was born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA and attended the University of Pittsburgh. I was in the Army from 1953-1955. I lived in Miami, Florida from 1955-1965. I worked at Ryder Corporation as a Rental Manager and as Director of Development for the University of Miami Medical School. I started my United Way career as a Loaned Executive in 1962. My other United Way roles included Division Director for Miami, FL (1963-1965), Campaign Director for Birmingham, AL (1966-1970), Regional Manager for Los Angeles, CA (1970-1973), Associate Executive Director for Minneapolis, MN (1973-1977), Mid-America Director for United Way of

America (1977-1979), Senior Vice President for United Way of America (1979-1982), President for Louisville, KY (1982-1986), and President for Cleveland, OH (1986-1995).

I retired in 1995 and worked as a nonprofit consultant for the Boys and Girls Club, Salvation Army, a local food bank, and many others. Taking advantage of the beautiful weather in Phoenix, I worked on the TPC golf course as a starter. I have been married to Merle for 47 years this August. I have six children, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Spending time with family and doing some traveling keeps us busy. ■

## Hugh Parry (Wilmette, IL)

I began my career in the legislative areas of education and health and human services in the New York State Senate before moving to Chicago and joining the City of Colleges of Chicago, where I oversaw community-based adult basic education, English as a second language, and GED programs. Following that job, I joined the United Way network in 1980 where I served in multiple roles at the local, state (UWI), and national (NCL) levels, eventually leading the Chicago metropolitan United Way.

In 2002, after a 22-year career with United Way, I accepted the role of CEO of Prevent Blindness America (aka The National Society to Prevent Blindness) where my UW experience in affiliate systems came in handy. That role mushroomed into international public health advocacy centered on eyecare. I retired in

2018 to devote time to mentoring public policy graduate students at the University of Chicago, chairing a foundation board, and serving on the board of the First Nonprofit Unemployment Savings Program.

This past March I returned to United Way as the interim director for 2-1-1 NY. Working alongside Keith Barsuhn, who is the interim CEO of UWNYS, we have endeavored to enhance the 211 network, produce the next iteration of ALICE, maintain a robust government affairs system, and ready UWNYS and 211NY to find new leaders. The work has been great fun for me though it still strikes me as odd to be working from home four states to the west of New York.

When I’m not working, I enjoy golf, gardening, reading, and my volunteer work. I live in Wilmette, Illinois with my wife Charyl. ■

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# REMEMBERING FRIENDS



## Michael Griggs

Michael Griggs, 67, of Davidson, NC died June 30, 2021 at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas.

Michael was born July 10, 1953 in Brooklyn, NY. He earned a Bachelor's of Science in Psychology from the Pennsylvania State University in 1975 and a Master's of Social Work from the Virginia Commonwealth University in

1981. Michael had a 27-year career with United Way in Richmond (VA), Raleigh (NC), Little Rock (AK), Charlotte (NC), and Wilmington (NC). He was Southeast Regional Director for United Way of America.

Michael is survived by his wife, Roxane Dean, and numerous friends and family members, including fifteen beloved nieces and nephews and numerous great-nieces and nephews. He always enjoyed his role as "Uncle Michael."

Michael was known for his outgoing personality, his spirit, and his optimism. He fought six years through multiple myeloma, myelodysplastic syndrome, and finally acute myeloid leukemia.

Several of Michael's former colleagues are planning a video call to share stories and honor their friendship with Michael. Please email [info@uwra.org](mailto:info@uwra.org) if you would like to receive information as those details are finalized. ■



## IN MEMORIAM

Please visit the UWRA Memorial Wall at [www.uwra.org/acknowledgements](http://www.uwra.org/acknowledgements) to view a recent list of gifts made to UWRA to honor colleagues, friends, and family from the United Way community.

# THANK YOU!

## 20TH ANNIVERSARY FOUNDATION FOR THE CAROLINAS CHALLENGE MATCH

Thank you, Lead Contributors, for contributing over \$8,000 towards our goal of \$10,000. We are nearly there!

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An Endowed Leadership Gift sustains your UWRA membership in perpetuity. Please join UWRA members who have acknowledged their United Way career by making an endowment contribution. It only takes twenty-five times the amount of your annual gift to establish a legacy contribution and help sustain UWRA's future.

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Contact [info@uwra.org](mailto:info@uwra.org) for more information about UWRA's endowment, or simply direct a contribution to:

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# ISSUES FACING AMERICAN UNITED WAY LEADERS A FIFTY-YEAR PERSPECTIVE

By Dick Aft, United Way Historian and UWRA Emeritus Board Member

Three times – fifty years ago, twenty-five years ago and very recently – local chief executives were asked to share a list of the top five operational issues with which they were concerned as leaders in the United Way movement. From those lists, a consensus summary was prepared and publicly shared as follows:

### 50 YEARS AGO

Emerging donor choice issues prompted by new Combined Federal Campaign policies

Continued proliferation of non-profit organizations that had begun following the Federal grants pipeline that had been opened by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964

Growing substance abuse

Competition among separate urban and suburban United Way organizations

Racism and sexism

### 25 YEARS AGO

Increased fundraising competition

Changing family structure, especially the increasing number of single-parent households

Declining quality of public urban education

Random Federal funding cuts

Racism and sexism

### THIS YEAR

Third-party processors usurping long-term corporate relationships

Being known more for fundraising than impact on community problems

Increasing rate of staff turnover

Keeping up with technology

Racism and sexism

#### Each list reflects several perspectives:

- The environment in which local United Way organizations serve their communities
- The impact of external forces on their capacity to achieve goals and objectives
- The values held by the people whose leadership significantly defines United Way

#### All reinforce the need of local United Way organizations to:

- Work together to address these issues
- Share the most effective actions to resolve them
- Support common services that, over the years, have included staff training and promotion and maintenance of relationships with organizations and individuals
- Find solutions that will increase the quality of life in all communities
- Influence national public policy, laws, and regulations
- Learn from their own shared history

In retrospect, readers might casually observe, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” While a majority of the specifics change, local United Way organizations continue to be confronted by issues that affect fundraising and quality of individual and family life. Continued concern for racism and sexism is a reminder of persistent issues. A deeper analysis of these issues serves as a reminder of several truths proven by United Way history.

1. The issues defined by United Way leaders transcend individual organizations. They touch nearly every community.
2. They directly relate to that common part of the United Way mission: “to improve lives” and United Ways’ focal responsibility to raise money to do so.
3. United Way continues to serve a centrist role in most communities, developing resources and focusing public attention on causes of problems more often than symptoms of problems.

From her position as U.S. President of United Way Worldwide and past President of the United Way Suncoast (Tampa, FL), Suzanne McCormick offered this observation.

*“What has become painfully obvious to me is that in fifty years, as a United Way network, we haven’t collectively moved the needle enough in creating more equitable societies and definitely not in terms of equal access to education and opportunity. We haven’t moved the needle far enough in creating an understanding of the impact we make in communities. We haven’t moved the needle far enough in creating an imperative understanding that we need to invest resources for the best skills and staff talent to help us solve the world’s most complex social problems to improve lives. We have been playing catch up for too long, without ever actually having caught up. It’s time to stop reinventing the wheel and trying to create solutions in silos or community by community. The future clearly dictates that if we truly want to improve lives, we must harness the power of shared technology, create multi-sector partnerships, and work together – as a functional network – with shared values for shared solutions. We’ve been on a listening journey recently, and are actively learning from our history, our mistakes, and our successes. We hope to change the environment we’ve been operating in to allow for more innovation sharing, best practice sharing and learning, and genuine partnership.”*

**Reflection:** This periodic look at issues identified by professional United Way leaders goes beyond the thought that “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” This snapshot of issues underscores the continuing efforts of local, national, and international United Way leaders to confront them in a united way. ■



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