

Don Cowles
Richmond, VA
March 4, 2008

UNITED WAY ANNUAL CAMPAIGN CELEBRATION

“THE COMMON GOOD”

Thank you, Claiborne. And, congratulations, friends.

Your 2007 fundraising campaign was a tremendous success by almost any measure—

- \$20 million dollars raised
- 60,000 donors
- over 600 employers

What amazing teamwork by you, and what overwhelming generosity by you and your friends and neighbors.

Pat your neighbor on the shoulder, and say “Congratulations!”

As Claiborne mentioned in her introduction, I serve as Chair of the United Way’s Community Building Committee. We have responsibility for investing your money for community impact. So, this morning, I come with very deep gratitude—deep gratitude from

- The 25 community leaders who serve on our Committee,
- The 70 who serve on its four Action Councils,
- The 53 agencies who manage the 112 programs that we fund, and
- Most importantly, the 200,000 clients whom they serve.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

As Tony D’Angelo puts it, “Without your sense of caring, there can be no sense of community.”

Several years ago, I was invited by friends at Bank of America’s Private Bank to one of their client lunches. As you might expect, in good financial times, these lunches are upbeat and a lot of fun. However, this particular year we were experiencing a recession, and the financial news was not uplifting.

Much to my delight the luncheon speaker was Jacob Needleman, professor of philosophy at San Francisco State University and author of Money and the Meaning of Life. I left that luncheon with one wonderful, motivating message: “Each one of us is a unique person, with a special purpose in life. **Invest in fulfilling your purpose.**”

I have one object in my brief remarks this morning—that you, the leaders of the United Way fundraising campaign, sense that you have invested in something especially purposeful and meaningful to you—the common good of Metropolitan Richmond.

You are making a world of difference.

First, you are improving individual lives. Second, you are improving systems that serve the common good. And, third, you are building trust across race, class and jurisdiction by spreading a vision of the common good throughout our entire Region.

Today you are improving individual lives by investing in three critical areas of community need—

1. children, youth and families;
2. the homeless; and
3. older adults.

You are doing this through 53 high-quality agencies, serving over 200,000 people in eight counties and three cities that make up the Richmond Region.

It was almost 10 years ago, around the time the Richmond Region developed its Vision 2010, that we established these three focus areas for community investment. At the time we also set complementary 10 year goals and began tracking our progress using various performance indicators.

You may recall that one of our goals established at the time was that all students should be reading at grade level in 3rd grade. Our measure would be SOL test results.

Well, over the past five years I have personally witnessed the impact of your investment in the children, youth and families of Woodville Elementary School. Most of the Woodville families live in the Creighton and Fairfield Court housing projects and receive valuable support from United Way through Family Lifeline, Friends Association and others.

Believe it or not, by 2006, half way through the Vision 2010 planning period, over 98% of Woodville 3rd graders were proficient in reading.

I bring special thanks from Toneisha Johnson, whom I mentored at Woodville for five years.

Of course, there are thousands of students like Toneisha and dozen of schools like Woodville across our Region today. And there are many other indicators of progress in each of our focus areas.

Turn to your neighbor and say, “**You are making a world of difference.**”

In addition to improving lives, you are investing to improve systems that serve the common good.

Just over a year ago, after the sale of our old office building, the United Way Board chose to invest \$1 million from accumulated reserves for “breakthrough” initiatives in our major focus areas.

Today we are investing in three very promising initiatives.

- One is deploying a proven-model for teen pregnancy prevention in Petersburg.
- Another is developing a quality rating system for Early Childhood Development centers.

- And the third is implementing the successful Healing Place model to fill a major gap in our homeless services system for addicts and alcoholics.

Each is meeting or exceeding its performance milestones. And each is reviewed in this year's Annual Report.

Friends, you are making a world of difference. Look across the table and give your neighbor a thumbs up.

Finally, you are transforming our Region—from the inside out—by spreading a vision of the common good which builds trust across old divisions of race, class and jurisdiction. And you do it simply—by caring for one another.

It makes sense, doesn't it? You created United Way to serve the common good. And, the United Way could not succeed without the trust of its many stakeholders—donors, social service agencies, government partners and the many volunteers and clients who cross the divides of race, class and jurisdiction every day to care for one another.

This work of trust building may be our most humble investment, yet the one that promises the greatest return.

What gives rise to this thought? It occurred to me while reading Dr. James Crupi's report on the future of the Richmond Region.

How many of you are familiar with Dr. Crupi's challenging report?

You can find the report on the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce website or by googling Dr. James Crupi (CRUPI) and the title of his report, "Putting the Future Together".

In his report, after celebrating the Richmond Region's tremendous geographic, economic and demographic advantages, Dr. Crupi falls into despair. He finds our Region divided by race, class and jurisdiction. He laments that, without a unifying vision, we may never realize our Regional potential and fulfill our purpose together. Here are Crupi's top three imperatives. The Richmond Region must:

1. develop an overarching Regional vision that aligns area leaders around a set of priorities;
2. move from being tactical to strategic thinkers and doers; and
3. bridge longstanding historical and cultural divides that undermine trust, breed caution and prevent bold initiatives.

Unless we do this, Crupi says, we are unlikely to leverage our greatest strengths and address pressing Regional issues of concentrations of poverty, education, affordable housing, transportation, and workforce development.

As you listen to Dr. Crupi's observations, does it occur to you, as it does to me, that somehow when we work together through the United Way with **a vision of the common good**, we overcome these obstacles?

Friends, I think we, as the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg, have an important role to play in the upcoming Regional visioning process.

Imagine the difference it would make if the United Way, as a community of 600 employers, 60,000 donors, 53 agencies, and hundreds of thousands of volunteers and clients, joined the Regional planning process with the bold affirmation **“Yes, we can”**? We can have an overarching vision of the Region and its common good. We can be strategic thinkers and doers when seeking the common good. We can care for one another and seek the common good across race, class and jurisdiction.

Friends, we really are making a world of difference!

By working together, we are improving individual lives, strengthening social service delivery systems and spreading a Regional vision of the common good across old divides of race, class and jurisdiction.

Please join me in advocating “the common good” in the upcoming Regional visioning process.

Thank you. And, enjoy your well-deserved celebration.

Remarks by Don Cowles
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