

Day of Caring kicks off United Way fundraising push

By Mack Burke Transcript Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, September 18, 2015 7:15 am

There's never a day off for the United Way. While there is no end to the work it does, today's Day of Caring is a mile marker.

The Day of Caring begins at 8 a.m. at Journey Church with breakfast, pictures and a presentation to get volunteers fired up and ready to go. Volunteer groups will then go to the assigned agency to begin the project around 9 a.m. Volunteers will continue working on the project and will be given a box lunch at the agency. Volunteers will complete the project between noon and 4 p.m. All volunteers also receive a T-shirt.

"Volunteers have the opportunity to give their time and energy to helping a selected nonprofit agency," United Way of Norman representative Jed Dembowski said. "This project connects volunteers to their community. Volunteers have the opportunity to learn more about the social service agency. It also serves as a team building project for each group that participates."

Projects can include things like planting flowers, painting walls, cleaning up a computer system, delivering meals, building cabinets or installing flooring.

"At this event we will recognize all of our Pacesetter companies for their contribution to this year's campaign, reveal the total they've raised and hand off the campaign to the rest of the community," Dembowski said. "We also use this event to pump up our Day of Caring volunteers before sending them out into the community to work."

With 33 companies and more than 560 volunteers signed up to volunteer at 30 nonprofits in Norman and Noble, it's another record year for United Way of Norman. Those volunteers form the backbone of the United Way's efforts in the community.

"We couldn't do what we do without the volunteer help," Dembowski said. "The Day of Caring makes such a big impact, not just on the United Way, but also on the agencies we are partnered with and other agencies in the community. It's kind of a point of entry for the United Way and some of the



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Sheri Shoemaker paints a wall at Variety Care during last year's Day of Caring event.

agencies, so that the volunteers can get to know us better.”

This year the United Way is allowing donors to designate their contributions to specific partner agency programs. The Day of Caring is a good way for the public to learn about those agencies and what they're passionate about addressing.

“Maybe it spurs them to make more of a contribution down the line,” Dembowski said. “A lot of them move on to do more volunteer work and serve on the boards of these agencies. They do all kinds of different things because of this one day.”

It may only be one day, but it's a big push for the United Way of Norman's local mission.

“It has been very gratifying to more fully understand the impact that each of our partner agencies makes in the community,” United Way of Norman president Von Allen said. “There is amazing work going on to meet the needs of our children, elders, addicted, mentally ill, sick, disabled, abused and victims of disaster ... Walking into many of our agencies will really open your eyes, and the issues can seem overwhelming and depressing. I like to think that every one of our agencies provides a beacon of hope to those who might have lost all hope. I guess the biggest challenge, for me personally, is acknowledging that we aren't meeting all the needs.”

Much like the organization and its partners, the United Way's mission is never fully realized. The need is too great, but that doesn't stop it and its partners from trying to raise the bar.

Editor's Note: The United Way is the largest privately-funded nonprofit in the world. It raises \$5 billion annually, works with 2.6 million volunteers and serves 1,800 communities across more than 40 countries and territories worldwide. Norman is one of those communities. In addition to its own programs, funds raised through United Way are distributed to community organizations and programs to help them make a difference. This 30-story series will highlight the local impact of those efforts and how the United Way's partner organizations affect the community.