

FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

UNITED IS THE WAY

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ONE COMMITTED TEAM, BOARD & COMMUNITY

PROUDLY SERVING DOUGLAS, OTTER TAIL, POPE, TODD, AND WADENA COUNTIES



MERGER STATUS



**WATCH MERGER
ANNOUNCEMENT**

OUR NEW NAME



UNITED WAY
Lakes and Prairie

OFFICIAL MERGER - JULY 1ST, 2025

Merger Update

On July 1, 2025, Lakes and Prairie United Way officially formed through the merger of United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties and United Way of Otter Tail & Wadena Counties, expanding our service area to include Douglas, Pope, Otter Tail, Wadena, and parts of Todd Counties. This collaboration combines the strengths of both teams, creating a connected regional network while continuing to honor the unique character and needs of each community we serve.

New Name

Our new name, Lakes and Prairie United Way, reflects the landscape, spirit, and communities that make up the region we serve. Thank you to everyone who shared stories, provided feedback, and helped guide this important decision! In the months ahead, you will continue to see updates as we work through the many steps needed to fully transition to our new name.



**READ PRESS
RELEASE**



CAMPAIGN THEME - UNITED IS THE WAY

UNITED IS THE WAY™

Each year, we select a theme that drives us to take a closer look at the most pressing issues in our community. For 2025-26, we have chosen **'United is the Way'** as our campaign theme, and we are putting our focus on ALICE. ALICE represents households that are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed. These are families who work hard, often in multiple jobs, but still struggle to afford life essentials. In our campaign messaging, we are sharing how **United is the Way we win for ALICE** by shining a light on their challenges and how we are strengthening programs, partnerships, and resources across our impact areas: **Healthy Community**, **Youth Opportunity**, **Financial Security**, and **Community Resiliency** to best serve ALICE Families

Why Focus on Alice

Our team is focused on ALICE households because while we continue to see a steady decline in poverty level households in our community, the number of ALICE households is rising. While 9% of our region lives in poverty, another 25% are ALICE, meaning more than one in three households struggle to make ends meet. ALICE families earn above the poverty level but still struggle to afford essentials like housing, childcare, transportation, and healthcare, making unexpected expenses such as car repairs or medical bills especially difficult. This year's campaign will share some of the common challenges facing ALICE and the role United Way plays in bridging gaps and creating opportunities.

Get Involved

We offer workplace campaigns and community presentations that build awareness of the vital work supporting ALICE families and we invite you to connect with our team to schedule a United Way conversation for your workplace, leadership group, or community organization. At presentations, our team provides resources, shares impact stories, and presents data that highlights the challenges and opportunities shaping our community.



RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU CREATE AN ENGAGING AND IMPACTFUL WORKPLACE CAMPAIGN EXPERIENCE

WORK PLACE CAMPAIGN PLANNING SHEET

Use this as a guide to navigate the different steps to your workplace campaign. If you have questions please reach out to your United Way Campaign manager.

STEP ONE | Pick Your Campaign & Plan Events

Decide when your campaign will run and what activities you'd like to include. Schedule a time for United Way to speak—we can join you in person, meet virtually, or send a short video message to your team. Just let us know what works best for you!

SET TWO | Hang Flyers & Share Message

Get the word out by hanging up event flyers and using the sample communication tools available on our website. We've provided a few posters about United Way to display.

STEP THREE | Host Your Campaign & Collect Pledges

Run your campaign and gather pledge forms from your team. We've included the pledge forms you'll need to make it easy. Digital files are on our website.

STEP FOUR | Wrap-up & Turn In Pledges

Once your campaign wraps up, fill out the summary paperwork and bring pledges, donations and the envelope worksheet to the United Way office.

Campaign Resources Can Be Found: <https://uwdp.org/campaign-resources/>



LEARN ABOUT
WORKPLACE
CAMPAIGNS



ADVOCACY- RURAL VOICES AT THE CAPITAL

This summer, 400 United Way leaders from across the country gathered in Washington, D.C. for United Way Worldwide's annual Advocacy Forum, Capitol Hill Day. Representing Minnesota were Jen Jabas, Executive Director of Lakes and Prairie United Way, and Stephannie L. Lewis, Associate Vice President of Advocacy and Community Impact at Greater Twin Cities United Way.

Jen brought a vital rural perspective, highlighting the challenges ALICE families face in Rural Minnesota, from limited access to affordable childcare and transportation to gaps in digital infrastructure and housing. Conversations with members of Congress focused on strengthening the 211 helpline and advancing the ALICE framework to ensure national policies reflect the realities of working families.

Help Us Advocate: You don't have to travel to Washington to make a difference. You can advocate right here at home by sharing United Way updates on social media, forwarding our newsletter to coworkers so they can stay up to date on work happening in our community, or telling a neighbor about United Way's 211 resources directory.

400+

UNITED WAY
LEADERS AT THE CAPITAL



READ
ARTICLE

UNITED WAY'S ANNUAL STATE CONFERENCE

United Way of Lakes and Prairie is proud to be part of the United Way's Minnesota State Association, a network that connects United Ways across the state. Through this partnership, we collaborate on advocacy, share research, and build strategies that strengthen our impact. In June, leaders from United Ways across Minnesota gathered at the Turning Leaf Business Complex for our annual State Conference. Guided by the theme "United Is the Way," the two-day conference focused on sharing resources across teams and departments to strengthen programming and share advocacy work.

Thanks to a grant from United Way Worldwide, the conference was affordable and accessible for all attendees. Speakers shared perspectives on topics ranging from navigating challenging times to the growing importance of cybersecurity, giving participants fresh insights to bring back to their communities.

We also heard from the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits on the state of the nonprofit sector, received communications updates from United Way Worldwide, and engaged with state team members on advocacy efforts and opportunities.

A highlight of the conference was celebrating the retirement of Doris Pagelkopf, who devoted more than two decades to building and leading United Ways of Minnesota and establishing a strong statewide network that connected 32 Minnesota United Ways through advocacy, research, training, and collaboration. This summer, we also welcomed new state director Beni Westgor, who steps into the role after seven years of experience with United Way.



SUMMER RECAP

GOLF CLASSIC RECAP

United Way's Golf Classic took place on June 9 at Geneva Golf Course, and we extend our sincere thanks to all the golfers, sponsors, and volunteers who made the 2025 event a success. Despite what may have been the coldest day on record, the rain held off and everyone had a great time!

Congratulations to Northwestern Mutual for taking first place with an impressive score of -11



VIEW EVENT PHOTOS

BIG OLE PADDLEFEST RECAP

Thank you to the 60 paddlers, our Geneva Capital Intern volunteers, our co-host Faction Marine, premier sponsor Sunopta, and all event sponsors for making this year's race a success. PaddleFest is an annual two-day event featuring a Big Ole 4.5-mile Alexandria Chain of Lakes timed race and an 8-mile Lena Long Prairie River cruise, bringing participants from across the state together for competition, recreation, and community fun on the water.

THANK YOU EVENT SPONSORS

PREMIER SPONSOR



Fueling the Future of Food

Arrowwood
RESORT & CONFERENCE CENTER



SANFORD
HEALTH



Vivie

faction
Magazine

BIG OLE 4.5 Mile Chain of Lakes | Friday, July 18th | 9am & 10am

LENA 8 Mile River Cruise Saturday, July 19th | 9am

BIG OLE WINNERS

Men's Stand-Up Paddleboard

Jeremy Nicholson
Thomas Zuccaro
Bob Skow

Women's Stand-Up Paddleboard

Jess Stuewe
Margaret Smullen
Deborah Reece

Men's Kayak

Jeff Lindoo
Mike Woida
Joseph Larson

Women's Kayak

Sara Ferguson
Chelsey Kingbell
Laura Jones



VIEW EVENT PHOTOS



2000+ TRAVELING TREE HOUSE RECAP

KIDS ATTENDED WEEKLY THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER

The Traveling Tree House summer programming wrapped up on August 15, bringing another season of learning and fun to communities across our region. This 75-minute program is led by United Way staff who are licensed teachers and includes story time, crafts, activities, a snack, and a free book of their choice for every child to take home. The goal is to spark a love for learning in a playful environment while helping to prevent summer learning loss.

This summer, The Traveling Tree House expanded its reach, visiting parks in Garfield, Carlos, Alexandria, Forada, Kensington, Brandon, Evansville, Fergus Falls, Wadena, and Perham, with 13 total sites.



STUFF THE BUS RECAP

Through the years, our region has stepped in to support students where it is needed most through the Stuff the Bus program. When the community rallies for our area students, we not only fill backpacks with supplies, we fill classrooms with confidence and hope. United is the Way we are starting students' new year off with confidence.

Stuff the Bus brought people and organizations together across Otter Tail, Douglas, and Pope Counties. From small businesses to local volunteers, support came in many forms, each one helping to ensure students could walk into school prepared for success.

12000+

STUDENTS RECEIVED BACK PACKS THROUGH STUFF THE BUS



If your business would like to be part of next year's programming please reach out to our team!

3000+ DAY OF CARING RECAP

8TH GRADE STUDENTS PARTICIPATED

For United Way's Day of Caring, 300 eighth grade students from Discovery Middle School in Alexandria went into the community to complete outdoor projects to those who needed help. This annual event strengthens our partnership in area schools and gives students a meaningful opportunity to give back.

Thank you to our 2025 Sponsors

ALEXANDRIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
CEG - CONSOLIDATED EQUIPMENT GROUP
SANFORD HEALTH
FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
BETHANY ON THE LAKE
GARDONVILLE



"They all worked hard the whole time! I told them this will be a good experience to put on their résumé for their first jobs. My husband has Parkinson's and I have problems with my back. This experience was so helpful and brought us both to tears. Thank you so much for organizing this. We are so grateful." – Kori and Robert, program participants.



UNITED IS THE WAY

Our community has been busy this summer, giving time and resources through events and programming. Volunteers make United Way and other service organization's work possible and drive real change in our community!



VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

We host a volunteer site called GetConnected where you can find local opportunities from United Way as well as other service organizations to volunteer with!

[VIEW OPPORTUNITIES](#)



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

We'd like to recognize Tim Johnson for his dedication to serving others through United Way volunteer opportunities. Tim has a long history of service, from his early work with the Boy Scouts of America to leading mission groups in Mexico. Today, he continues to give back by volunteering at the Pope County Food Drop, Backpack Attack, and with many other local United Way initiatives. After moving to the area with his wife to be near their children and grandchildren, Tim has become a steady presence in our community. "Tim has a true heart for service, and we are grateful for the time and energy he shares with United Way and our community," said Leah Wolkow, Impact and Engagement Manager at Lakes and Prairie United Way.

"Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much." - Helen Keller



TRAP SHOOTING TOURNAMENT

Alexandria Shooting Park | September 16th
Registration 3 pm - Event wraps up after a 6 pm Dinner

Get a team of five together and join us for the 10th Annual Regional Trap Shoot Tournament. The afternoon includes a round of trap shooting, raffles, and a dinner to end the day. It's an opportunity to test your skills, network, and support United Way's work in our region.



SPONSORSHIP MARKETING BENEFITS	\$250	\$500	\$1000
	✓	✓	✓
Range Sponsor Sign With Your Logo Placed At The Range	✓	✓	✓
Recognition During Event Awards	✓	✓	✓
Target Sponsor Two Signs With Your Logo At The Range		✓	✓
Trap Team Included (\$500 Value) Recognized On Event Marketing			1

THE UNITED WAY 2025 CHILI COOK-OFF THEME IS...



JOIN US FOR UNITED WAY'S ANNUAL CHILI COOK-OFF

ALEXANDRIA OCTOBER 7TH | PERHAM OCTOBER 21ST

This fall, we're looking forward to hosting the 26th Annual United Way Chili Cook-off in Alexandria, and to expand the event with our first-ever Chili Cook-off in Perham. Themed around board games, this fun community tradition invites participants to dress up, decorate their booths, and compete for awards in five unique categories. The event is open to the public, with a \$20 ticket, allowing attendees to taste and judge all contestants' chili entries. In Alexandria, more than 150 people attend each year, making it a lively and well-loved fall gathering.

Businesses and organizations are invited to join the fun by sponsoring a booth. For \$100, participants can rent a space, serve up their best chili, and showcase their creativity. Event sponsorships are also available for those interested in additional marketing benefits while helping cover event costs.



VIEW EVENT
DETAILS



OUR 2025-26 LIVE UNITED PARTNERS

Community giving leaders investing in [Youth Opportunity](#), [Healthy Communities](#), [Financial Security](#), and [Community Resiliency](#).



FOLLOW UNITED WAY LAKES AND PRAIRIE ONLINE



LOOKING FOR RESOURCES?



CALL OR VISIT ONLINE | FREE | CONFIDENTIAL | 24/7

211 is a free and confidential program run by United Way that connects people to local resources like food, housing, mental health support, and more.

Call: 211 | Text: 211 | Online: 221.org

UNITED WAY CONTACT INFORMATION

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