

Spring  
2025

# NEWSLETTER

THEN NOW & INTO THE FUTURE

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### STRONGER TOGETHER



#### UNITED WAY MERGER EXPANDS THEIR REACH IN THE REGION

Source: Jen Jabas, United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties, Executive Director. [uwdo.org](#)  
Author: Mary Phipps, LCSC Communications Coordinator

In Alexandria and Fergus Falls, Minnesota, an important transformation is underway that aims to broaden the impact of improving the lives of our friends and neighbors. Leading this charge is Jen Jabas, Executive Director of United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties. Her days already brimming with the multifaceted responsibilities of leading a vital community support organization, have taken on an added layer of complexity and excitement. Jabas is orchestrating a crucial merger, a strategic alliance that will unite her United Way with the neighboring United Way of Otter Tail & Wadena Counties.

This ambitious consolidation, set to take effect on July 1, 2025, will empower the newly formed entity to serve a vast region that includes the four counties of Douglas, Pope, Otter Tail, and Wadena and stretches into parts of Todd County.

They are currently in the integration phase, working on how to merge the two United Ways while preserving what is essential for each community in the region they serve. Letters and emails announcing the merger have been sent to major donors, partners, and stakeholders in the communities served by both United Ways.

Jabas recognizes that the needs can and do look different in each community they serve. They are planning for all existing board members to continue to serve and contribute to unified efforts, and the current office and staff in Alexandria, Fergus Falls, and Perham will remain intact. "As we go through the merger process, we will continue to have a local presence," said Jabas.

The name of the merged United Way is still yet to be determined. There has been outreach to the communities, and a survey has been sent to seek feedback and ask for naming ideas. Supporters have suggested three top names, and the United Way team met from across the region and reviewed the feedback.

Soon the board will meet and decide on the name that will carry this large, regional nonprofit serving thousands of people each year into the future. They expect to announce the name close to the merger date of July 1.

There are various cycles for determining funding distributions for community investments and grants for each United Way. For the first year, they will continue to provide funding independently, and then, after that, they will open a grant-making process that will be unified for the region.

Jabas is enthusiastic about establishing consistency in campaign messaging throughout the region, recognizing that this approach will increase efficiency.



## MERGER STATUS

United Way of Douglas & Pope are anticipating our merger with United Way of Otter Tail & Wadena Counties to become official July 1st, 2025.

## NEW NAME SURVEY

Thank you for submitting your input to our United Way name survey. We are in the final stages of reviewing our name selections and can't wait to share our new name with you soon!

# MERGER EXPANDS REGIONAL REACH FOR ALICE

## UNITED FOR IMPACT

In the April edition of the Lakes Country Service Cooperative newsletter, Jen Jabas, Executive Director of United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties, shared insights into our soon to be official merger with United Way of Otter Tail & Wadena Counties. This collaboration brings together the strengths of both teams to expand support across Douglas, Pope, Otter Tail, Wadena, and parts of Todd Counties. By uniting our efforts, we're building a more connected regional network while continuing to honor the unique character and needs of each local community.

## COLLECTIVE PURPOSE

Together, we're creating new opportunities to customize programs and deliver meaningful resources where they're needed most. One shared focus is the ALICE initiative, which helps us better understand and respond to the needs of working families who face financial hardship. With combined expertise and a shared commitment, we're developing solutions that reduce barriers and help our community thrive.



# NEWLY RELEASED - STATE OF ALICE

United Ways across Minnesota, including our local team, have partnered with United For ALICE to bring critical data reporting focused on the communities we serve. We use these insights to shape our strategy, target investments, and develop programs that meet people where they are. This data doesn't just inform us, it drives us. It helps ensure that every decision we make is grounded in the real needs of local families and is focused on creating lasting impact. By understanding the challenges ALICE households face, we can build smarter, stronger solutions that move our entire community forward. ALICE is an acronym and tool kit supported by United Way that puts focus on our Asset Limited, Income Restrained, Employed community members.

State of ALICE Press Release - Published May, 2025 - Key Take Aways:



Minnesota ranks 6th lowest in financial hardship among all U.S. states, yet over one-third of households still struggle to afford basic needs like housing, food, and child care.

60% of the youngest and 49% of the oldest households fall below the ALICE Threshold, highlighting that financial strain hits both early-career individuals and retirees especially hard.

71% of renters and 56% of homeowners below the threshold are housing burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing, often at the expense of other essentials.

Now that the State of ALICE report for the year has been published, we are looking forward to our upcoming merger with Otter Tail and Wadena Counties and our 2025-2026 strategy planning sessions to ensure we are putting our efforts toward the ALICE population in our communities.

[Read the State of ALICE Report on our website blog.](#)

## "I HAVE A JOB AND WORK HARD EVERY DAY, BUT IT'S STILL NOT ENOUGH TO MAKE ENDS MEET" - 1 IN 3 MINNESOTA HOUSEHOLDS

TOGETHER WE ARE BUILDING A COMMUNITY WHERE EVERYONE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO THRIVE

**ACT FOR ALICE® >>**

**1. BECOME INFORMED**

READ THE STATE OF ALICE IN MINNESOTA ON OUR BLOG

**2. DONATE**

**3. VOLUNTEER**

**4. ADVOCATE**





# 600+ BACK PACK ATTACK

PROGRAM SERVES OVER 600 STUDENTS EVERY WEEKEND

This school year, more than 600 students received food every weekend through the Backpack Attack program. This program is made possible by the incredible support of local businesses, churches and community members donating money to purchase the food and time to gather together to pack the food bags.

Backpack Attack provides supplemental food to students over the weekend throughout the school year. The program is available in participating Elementary Schools and Head Start classrooms. Families can contact their child's school to enroll. This supplemental food support helps ensure kids come to school Monday ready to focus, learn, and thrive.

## LOCAL VOLUNTEERS



## UNITED WAY FOOD DROP

[VIEW PROGRAM CALENDAR ON OUR WEBSITE](#)

The United Way Food Drop is a free, monthly food distribution program that provides supplemental groceries to individuals and families in Douglas and Pope Counties. Each month, the distribution alternates between New Life Church in Alexandria and the United Parish in Glenwood, always taking place on a Thursday. This program supports anyone facing hardship by helping stretch grocery budgets during difficult times.

Each month participants must pre-register either online or by phone the Tuesday before the food drop by calling our Alexandria United Way office. Pre-registration ensures we have enough food set aside for everyone. While there is no income requirement to receive groceries, we ask that only those currently experiencing need or hardship participate in this program.

## DOUGLAS COUNTY

HOUSEHOLDS SERVED EVERY OTHER MONTH

# 240+

## POPE COUNTY

HOUSEHOLDS SERVED EVERY OTHER MONTH

# 120+



# SPRING EVENT RECAP

### SIP

Beverages were sponsored by Copper Trail Brewing, Summer Lakes Beverage, Rolling Forks Vineyard, Carlos Creek Winery, Fulton Brewing, Odell Brewing Company, Thousand Lakes Brewing Co, Beverage Wholesalers, C&L Distributing, Breakthru Beverage, Phillips Wine & Spirits, Southern Glaziers Wine & Spirits, Johnson Brothers Gallo, Wine Merchants, Paustis Wine Company, Cashwise, and Burr Vineyards.

### SAVOR

Food for the event were provided by Pioneer Grill, Arrowwood, Cub Foods, Longtrees Woodfire Grill, Smokin' Brews & 'Ques, La Ferme, Papa K's Rescue BBQ, Qdoba, Lure

### EVENT SPONSORS



[VIEW PHOTOS ON FACEBOOK](#)

## SIP & SAVOR - EVENT RECAP

[VIEW EVENT PHOTOS ON OUR FACEBOOK](#)

Thank you to everyone who made our 2025 Sip & Savor a night to remember! From the incredible local food and beverage vendors, generous sponsors, volunteers, and talented musicians Blonde & the Bohunk - to those who attended, bought raffle tickets, and donated to our Endowment Fund.

Thanks to you, we surpassed our goal and raised over \$5,000 for our Endowment Fund to help ensure United Way continues serving Douglas and Pope Counties for years to come. Cheers to another incredible Sip & Savor, filled with bold flavors, great conversation, and a shared commitment to building a thriving community.

## WOMEN UNITED FUNDRAISER - EVENT RECAP

[VIEW EVENT PHOTOS ON FACEBOOK](#)

On Friday, April 11th, more than 100 women gathered at Crooked Willow for an inspiring night of fun and philanthropy hosted by Women United, a United Way affinity group. With bingo, a taco bar, silent auction, and raffle, the event raised \$15,000 for the Traveling Tree House and other United Way youth initiatives. Together, attendees are helping provide youth opportunities, ensuring every child in our community is provided opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive.

Thank you to our generous event sponsors, silent auction donors and all those who came out to support a great cause!

[LEARN ABOUT UNITED WAY WOMEN UNITED](#)

### Thank You

#### \$1,000 Gold Level Event Sponsors!



### Thank You

#### \$500 Bronze Level Event Sponsors!



### Thank You

#### \$250 Silver Level Event Sponsors!









## 26TH ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC

[VIEW EVENT DETAILS ON OUR WEBSITE](#)

Geneva Golf Course Monday, June 9th  
Shotgun Start 11am - Event wraps up around 5:00pm

Team spots are officially full for the Summer Golf Classic, our largest fundraising event of the year. We're looking forward to a great day on the course filled with connection, community, and fun!

## JOIN US FOR A MID-SUMMER ADVENTURE!

ALEXANDRIA CHAIN OF LAKES | FRIDAY, JULY 18TH & SATURDAY, JULY 19TH



## BIG OLE PADDLEFEST

[VIEW REGISTRATION ON OUR WEBSITE](#)

We'd love to have you Join us for the BIG OLE PaddleFest – a two day event supporting local United Way initiatives. Whether you're racing to win or just riding the current, paddlers ages 12+ are invited to **Kayak**, **Canoe**, or **SUP** through Alexandria's scenic Chain of Lakes on July 18, and down the beautiful Long Prairie River on July 19.

## TRAVELING TREE HOUSE

[NEXT STOP? FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK!](#)

Summer Traveling Tree House programming starts on June 9th. Follow our Traveling Tree House Facebook through the summer for themes, locations, and any schedule updates. Facebook: @TravelingTreeHouseUW

The Traveling Tree House is a mobile learning center that is organized and staffed by United Way team members who are also licensed educators. This program provides FREE summer learning opportunities for local youth. At each visit kids experience 75 minutes of reading, crafts, games, and snack time. A gently used donated book of their choice is sent home with them to keep after each visit.



### TRAVELING TREE HOUSE

#### PROGRAM DETAILS

The Traveling Tree House is a program of our local United Way. It is a mobile learning center offering FREE 75-minute summer sessions for local children, with a story time, crafts, activities, a snack, and a gently used book of their choice to take home after each visit. The mission of the Traveling Tree House is to provide learning opportunities that help all youth in our community thrive.

- Programming is designed for Pre-K through elementary aged children. All ages are welcome.
- Team members of United Way providing programming are licensed educators.
- Children must be supervised by a parent or guardian.
- No pre-registration needed.
- Weather cancellations are posted on Facebook @TravelingTreeHouseUW

**JUNE 9 - AUGUST 15, 2025**

**MONDAY**  
9:00am-10:15am: Osakis Osagi Park  
11:00am-12:15pm: Long Prairie Elementary School Playground

**TUESDAY**  
9:00am-10:15am: Garfield City Park  
10:45am-12:00pm: Carlos City Park  
1:00pm-2:15pm: Alexandria City Park

**WEDNESDAY**  
9:00am-10:15am: Forada City Park  
10:45am-12:00pm: Kensington Rune Stone Park  
1:00pm-2:15pm: Brophy Park

**THURSDAY**  
9:00am-10:15am: Brandon Lions Park  
10:45am-12:00pm: Evansville Park  
1:00pm-2:15pm: Fergus Falls Dr. Magnuson Park

**FRIDAY**  
9:00am-10:15am: Wadena Sunnyside Park  
11:00am-12:15pm: Perham Paul Miller Park

**LOOK FOR THE BUS!**



**DONATE YOUR GENTLY USED CHILDREN'S BOOKS TO UNITED WAY YOUTH PROGRAMMING**

DROP THEM OFF AT THE UNITED WAY OFFICE MONDAY - THURSDAY 8-4PM



GET INVOLVED

## VOLUNTEER

We've had hundreds of volunteers this year, below highlights many ways we've seen our community help build a thriving community over the year. **Thank you volunteers - we couldn't do our work without you!**



VOLUNTEER



## ADVOCATE

### HIGHSCHOOL SENIORS ADVOCATE FOR UNITED WAY 211

This spring, our team had the opportunity to work with two Alexandria Area High School CAPS students, Grace and Ellen, on a project that brought new energy to our 211 resource work, they partnered with the State of Minnesota 211 United Way team, updating our local agency directory, an essential tool for people searching for help with housing, food, mental health, and other basic needs.

After updating the directory the students created a marketing plan focused on reducing stigma and increasing awareness of 211 among their peers, educators, and the wider community. Their goal was to educate people to understand what 211 is and to share it when they recognize someone is in need.



They presented the program at Discovery Middle School & Alex Area High School staff meetings, Wake Up Alexandria, and to the Alex Police Department. For Mental Health Awareness Week, the students designed and handed out 211 information stickers, generously donated by Geneva Capital. They are extending their class project past their senior year, due to a developed passion for the project, and will be presenting the work they did on this project at the statewide United Way conference in June.

Huge appreciation goes to the students for their passion, and Alex Public Schools for supporting us in their CAPS class!

## LOOKING FOR RESOURCES?

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

211 is a free, confidential program ran by United Way that connects people to local resources like food, housing, mental health support, and more. Call: 211 | Text: 211 | Online: 221.org





## VIEW WAYS TO GET INVOLVED



## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

### BECKY ZWILLING

"Our team would like to thank Becky for her passion and commitment in supporting United Way and our community! Becky is a pillar volunteer for several events every year but especially this year when we found ourselves short on internal resources. She heavily supported us this spring at both Sip & Savor in February and Women United's annual event in April. HUGE thank you goes to Becky for partnering with us to help mobilize our community resources and help us continue to build a thriving community!" - Jen Jabas, Executive Director



## GIVE

SUPPORT INITIATIVES THAT BUILD A THRIVING COMMUNITY BY MAKING A GIFT TODAY  
**YOUR SUPPORT POWERS LOCAL RESOURCES AND LASTING IMPACT**

#### Make A One Time Donation

Make a one time donation with your credit or debit card.

[Make A Donation](#)

#### Make A Recurring Donation

Make a recurring donation with your credit or debit card.

[Make A Donation](#)

SIGN UP AS A SMALL BUSINESS 365 PARTNER | \$365+ ANNUAL COMMITMENT

**\$1 PER DAY**  
\$365 YEARLY

Can feed 20 families with food from the Food Drop.

**\$2 PER DAY**  
\$730 YEARLY

Support 75 students with backpacks full of school supplies through Stuff the Bus.

**\$3 PER DAY**  
\$1,095 YEARLY

Feeds 175 children with food for the weekend through Backpack Attack.



**LEARN ABOUT BUSINESS 365**

**11**

**CURRENT BUSINESS  
365 PARTNERS**

- ORB Management | Juettner Motors
- Hagstrom Engineering | Winning Edge
- Tom's Market/Food Pride
- Amy Christopherson State Farm Insurance
- Studio E Architects | Alex Tax & Business
- Meco 7 | The Edge | Zimny Insurance




# FIND US ONLINE


### Stay Connected Between Newsletters


Want to stay in the loop on what's happening across our community? Visit us online for updates on local events, programs, and community initiatives. Whether you're cheering on our Students United youth, supporting businesses that give back, or following to engage in upcoming events, your involvement helps move our mission forward. Follow us to stay connected and engaged with the work we're doing together!


### We're Now on LinkedIn

We're excited to expand our presence to LinkedIn. This platform will allow us to share insights on business engagement, professional networking, and meaningful community impact. You'll also find updates on statewide initiatives like ALICE and 211. If you want to stay informed and represent your company in purpose-driven ways, we invite you to follow us using the link below.









# THANK YOU TO OUR LIVE UNITED PARTNERS

SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY BY INVESTING IN HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND FINANCIAL STABILITY





# CONTACT INFORMATION

Located In: Hawthorne Plaza  
Address: 503 Hawthorne St. Suite 131  
Alexandria, MN 56308  
Phone: (320) 834-7800  
For 24/7 Resources Call 211