PRESS RELEASE
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MAYOR’S OFFICE, UNITED WAY KICK OFF WINTER ASSISTANCE FUND
AREA FUNDERS NEARLY TRIPLE 2008 SUPPORT TO MAKE SURE LOCAL RESIDENTS STAY WARM

INDIANAPOLIS -- Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard and United Way of Central Indiana (UWCI) President and CEO Ellen K. Annala today kicked off the Winter Assistance Fund drive by accepting $620,000 from eight local funders.

The start-up amount is nearly triple what was announced a year ago for the program to help low-income individuals and families avoid having their gas or electricity utilities turned off during winter months.

Bracing for a record number of requests for help from people affected by the economic downturn, United Way and Mayor Ballard have set a goal to raise $750,000 for the fund, the highest in the program’s 26-year history.

“I can’t say enough about how our community is pulling together to help others in this time of great hardship for so many of our neighbors,” said Mayor Ballard.

Start-up contributions, which put the fund within $130,000 of that goal, include $100,000 from Citizens Energy Group; $50,000 from Indianapolis Power & Light; $100,000 from Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust; $10,000 from The Indianapolis Foundation, a CICF affiliate; $50,000 from Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, Inc; $50,000 from The Indianapolis Retirement Home Fund, a CICF fund; $50,000 from James Proctor Fund for Aged Men and Women, a CICF Fund; and $160,000 from Lilly Endowment Inc.

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Citizens Energy Group also pledged to match, dollar-for-dollar, donations its customers make to the fund, up to $50,000.

Today’s Winter Assistance Fund announcement includes $320,000 which was part of the Community Economic Relief Fund launched in December.

“Our social service agencies tell us that when they can help people with basics like utility costs, they can then help them avoid the downward spiral toward more critical problems, such as hunger and homelessness,” Annala said.

The Winter Assistance Fund is for Marion County residents whose income exceeds guidelines for government energy assistance, yet still have difficulty keeping up with high winter heating bills.

Last year, the fund helped 1,204 households, including seniors and families with children, by raising more than $311,456 in assistance.

In 2008, the funds were exhausted by mid-March. This year organizers expect even greater demand for the assistance and want to keep the program available through May 2009.

Customers of Citizens Energy Group and IPL will receive Winter Assistance Fund contribution envelopes in their gas and electric bills, making it easier for individuals to give to the fund.

Contributions are tax deductible and can also be made online at www.uwci.org, or by mailing a check to: United Way of Central Indiana, Winter Assistance Fund, Post Office Box 660054, Indianapolis, IN, 46266-0054

Residents can dial 2-1-1 to find the nearest neighborhood community center or township trustee office to apply for help through the Winter Assistance Fund.

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