



United Way **Community Matters**

By Mary Lou Goeke

United Way Sets New Goals for Distribution of Funds - New Goals Reflects a Changing Santa Cruz County

Earlier this month, our United Way of Santa Cruz County announced the setting of new goals to reflect new priorities in the county as represented by the Community Assessment Project Report and the most recent trends in the county. The new goals and fund distribution plan were developed by the donor volunteers of the Agency Relations Committee and approved by the United Way Board of Trustees. Setting goals is part of the United Way Fund Distribution process which reviews goal areas every three years to insure that money raised by the community for the United Way Community Fund is directed to areas that improve the whole community.

The newly developed results-oriented goals include youth succeeding in school and in life, working families becoming financially stable and independent, and residents achieving good health. Each goal area has several measurable results such as increased high school graduation rate, amount of assets gained and sustained, increased health insurance coverage for children. The committee reviewed currently funded programs to insure that each address a new goal and delivers desired results. Programs that meet this criteria will be invited back for another three years of funding.

Ceil Cirillo chaired the Committee to revise our goals. She said, "It is important to us that the donor funds invested by the United Way go to the most important issues in our community, especially in light of current economic realities. We want to be able to say three years from now that we have made appreciable progress towards our goals and that life has improved for the people in Santa Cruz County."

Research sponsored by our United Way of Santa Cruz County and reported in the Community Assessment Project highlights the fact that the basic ingredients for a good life are increasingly beyond reach for many hard-working families. In Santa Cruz County, many families are not self-sufficient which means they are unable to meet their basic needs without public or

private assistance. 30% of families making less than \$35,000 a year have to spend between 60- 85% of their income on housing, leaving very little for food, health care, emergencies. In the area of school success, the dropout rate for high school students over a four year period is over 20%. And in the area of good health, over 22% of county children between the ages of 5-19 are overweight, while over 50% of adults are reported as overweight or obese.

We know that school success, adequate income and good health are the building blocks for a good life. They are interconnected. School success is essential to getting and keeping a job with a livable wage and health benefits. An income adequate to support the family and save for the future provides a level of financial stability. And access to quality health care keeps children on track at school and adults productive at work. Remove any one of these building blocks and the other two topple.

Our United Way has consistently focused on youth, family services and health. What is new for us is the goal of promoting financial stability for families. In these uncertain economic times, helping working families achieve financial stability can mean the difference between slipping into poverty or improving their prospects and those of their children for a better future.

Agency programs funded according to our new goals and distribution plan will be announced in May.

For the past 16 years Mary Lou Goeke has been the Executive Director of the United Way of Santa Cruz County. She has 32 years of experience providing social services to elders, children and families. The mission of United Way is to improve the lives of the people of Santa Cruz County by convening the community to seek solutions to their needs and by efficiently raising funds for the human care programs the United Way supports. Their website is www.unitedwaysc.org.