

Larimer United Way attempts record: Goal for this year's drive totals \$8 million

*By Sarah Bultema
Loveland Reporter-Herald*

The annual United Way of Larimer County fundraising campaign kicks off today — and officials are raising the bar higher than ever before.

For the 2010-11 campaign, the organization that supports nonprofits around the area is upping its goal by 20 percent, hoping to raise a record \$8 million during the year.

It is an ambitious target — but one that's necessary to address the growing need in Larimer County, said Gordan Thibedeau, president and CEO of the local United Way.

"It's not what we think we might be able to raise, but it's what we need to raise to address the dramatically increased need," Thibedeau said.

"It's an extraordinary shift to meet extraordinary times."

The nonprofit fundraising organization — which distributes money back into Larimer County communities to help people in need — has seen a significant increase in demand on agencies since the recession hit about two years ago.

More residents are finding themselves in need — during a time when donors are unable to give as much money.

Among the nonprofits feeling the squeeze is the Food Bank for Larimer County.

The food bank's client load that used to sit around 9,000 people each month has ballooned into about 12,000 individuals seeking assistance every month, said Amy Pezzani, executive director.

"Our need had increased substantially," said Pezzani, who noted that the growing demand means the nonprofit needs an extra semi truck-load of food each week.

Loveland's House of Neighborly Service has found a record rise in clients, too, with a 269 percent increase in requests for emergency shelter.

"Obviously any organization that provides basic human services, we're all seeing the impact of the economy," Pezzani said. "And it's not going to go away anytime soon, because people have lost a lot."

The United Way of Larimer County, which helps support these agencies, hopes to ease their financial strain.

But it needs the community's help to do it.

"We've always been impressed by the remarkable generosity of our community," Thibedeau said. "We're asking them to step up and go just a little bit further than normal."

The annual campaign, which gains most of its momentum in September, calls on individual donors and workplace fundraising campaigns to give to the cause through June 2011.

Coordinators hope they can raise enough to keep nonprofits afloat and helping people in need.

“All these dollars raised stay here and go into supporting our friends, our family, our neighbors and our co-workers who are suffering,” Thibedeau said.

“We have an awful lot of our residents here suffering. ... I hope people will step up and be a part of the solution.”

For more information about donating to the United Way of Larimer County’s fundraising campaign, call 407-7000 or visit [www.u waylc.org](http://www.uwaylc.org).

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