FROM SARAH WALDMAN

This year is shaping up to be a very busy one for the United Way of the Midlands Women’s Leadership Council (WLC). We continue to monitor the incredible progress of our Train to Gain initiative and are seeing an immediate impact from the Book Trust program. I encourage you to read on to learn more about both of these initiatives and the WLC’s continued effort to impact poverty by promoting success in the classroom and beyond.

Our “Mary C. Lopez Lunch and Learn” series continues to provide valuable opportunities for discussion of important issues facing our community. In this issue, you’ll find photos and a summary of the Book Trust event in April. The next luncheon on August 29 will explore the existence of need in every neighborhood, regardless of zip code.

Again this year, we are planning volunteer opportunities specifically for our WLC membership. Please mark your calendars for the United Way of the Midlands “Day of Action” on June 21 and “Day of Caring” on August 25. These opportunities to help our most vulnerable neighbors are incredibly meaningful to the agencies served as well as the participants. I look forward to seeing you there!

Lastly, I’d like to thank the WLC Steering Committee as well as all WLC members serving on committees. Your support and commitment to the WLC is so incredibly important to accomplishing our goals. Committee involvement is a great way to further your United Way investment and make a significant difference in our community. For more information about serving on a WLC committee, please contact Mikaela Borecky at 402.522.7908 or mborecky@uwmidlands.org.
One of our community’s leading female citizens recently received a well-deserved honor.

In recognition of a lifetime of service to the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area, the state of Nebraska and our nation, Marian Andersen received the “Excellence in Impact” award from United Way of the Midlands on April 26. Marian and her late husband Harold “Andy” Andersen were the first Omaha members of the United Way Tocqueville Society, and served as the inaugural chairs of the leadership giving organization in the metro area.

Ken Stinson, Chair Emeritus of Peter Kiewit Sons’, Inc. presented the award to Mrs. Andersen, noting that she has made a measurable impact in many areas of life in Omaha and the state of Nebraska. On her United Way service, Stinson said “She and Harold asked friends, colleagues and community newcomers to share their good fortune for the benefit of a stronger community. On behalf of the thousands of less fortunate in our community who are the beneficiaries of United Way support, we thank you for your leadership and your lifelong commitment to making our community a better place for all.”

United Way of the Midlands president and CEO Shawna Forsberg thanked the Andersens for their commitment, as leaders and donors. From their founding of the local Tocqueville Society to today, the group has invested more than $84 million, which has resulted in the delivery of 1.9 million human services to neighbors in need across the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area. “Our community is truly blessed that Marian and Andy had the vision and belief in the community that led to the creation of the Tocqueville Society,” said Forsberg.

Members of the Women’s Leadership Council received a Lunch and Learn update on UWM’s “Book Trust” partnerships on April 6. As of May 8, students from the ten participating schools have received about 47,000 free books to read and to keep. (Pictured, from left to right are: Ebony Harvey – Principal, Wakonda Elementary-Omaha Public Schools; Shawna Forsberg – President & CEO, United Way of the Midlands; Panel moderator, Dr. Rose Edzie – Director of Development, University of Nebraska Foundation; Julie Danker – Literacy Coach, Bloomer Elementary-Council Bluffs Community School District and Dr. Mark Adler – Superintendent, Ralston Public Schools.)

Moderator, Dr. Rose Edzie.
The “Train to Gain for Student Success” initiative launched by United Way’s Women’s Leadership Council (WLC) is on track and now projected to help even more at-risk children and teens than originally estimated.

In partnership with Collective for Youth, we are working to eliminate the education achievement gap between low-income students and their peers, by providing additional high-quality and research-based training to the staff members at local “out of school time” programs.

In its second year, about 350 youth program employees are engaged in the training – with a projected impact on nearly 6,000 metro area students through the end of 2017. The “Youth Work Methods” course includes topics like “Ask-Listen-Encourage”, homework help, cooperative learning and ways to manage conflict.

Directors at all of the 30 sites within Collective for Youth’s network of Omaha Public Schools community learning centers are participating. Feedback has been positive, including that of Raymone Sazone, who is program site director at Kennedy Elementary. Sazone says the training has helped him reach out with a positive and supportive attitude, to help his students overcome obstacles and achieve their best.

Scholastic Books’ delivery days are particularly joyous events at ten local schools, as WLC members can attest. Thanks to our members and other United Way donors, children in schools with a high poverty rate in six local school districts have now received more than 41,000 books to keep, read and take home to share with their families.

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“In not a day goes by that a student doesn’t show me a book with excitement” says Sara Pruss, Literacy Coach at Edison Elementary in the Council Bluffs Community Schools. “Kids loving books and reading – it’s something every teacher has sought since the beginning of time. Because of you, we’ve achieved it.”

In addition to contributions from the WLC, members of the Young Professionals Council help with Book Trust as well, by volunteering monthly at Kennedy Elementary in the Omaha Public Schools.

The public school districts involved in the local Book Trust effort are Omaha, Council Bluffs, Millard, Westside, Ralston and Bellevue.
RAISING AWARENESS
United Way of the Midlands is pro-actively working with area media outlets to increase awareness of local human service challenges and the work underway to address them.

In January 2017, UWM kicked off a year-long series of news releases, videos, social media emails and posts to spotlight “core topics” that are addressed by the organization’s funded programs and community partnerships. Already, United Way has experienced an increase in email engagement and received several topic-related media inquiries. Since the first of this year, the team has shared important local information on these important topics:

- Grade-Level Reading
- Key Life Skills
- Hunger
- Volunteer Engagement

May’s topic is “Stable Housing” and the team is gathering photos, video and current information on donor-supported programs that help people address the gaps they may have between their income and rent, including development of strong budgeting behaviors and overall financial stability.

We encourage members to follow United Way of the Midlands on social media, to remain up-to-date on the work our group is supporting in the areas of basic needs, academic achievement and financial stability.

FAMILIES & POVERTY
A nationally-recognized expert in the field of family poverty will provide the keynote address at United Way’s next symposium on June 8.

Anne Mosle, vice president of the Aspen Institute and executive director of the organization’s Ascend policy program will discuss the multi-generational approach to addressing poverty.

The event will be held at University of Nebraska Omaha’s Milo Bail Student Center from 8 a.m. to noon. Partners in the symposium are UNO, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and First National Bank.

Under Mosle’s leadership, Ascend has become a leading force in creation of a two-generation approach to breaking the cycle of poverty. She has launched groundbreaking Ascend initiatives that have transformed the two-generation policy landscape into a game-changing approach for families. Mosle serves on the Advisory Committee of the Oxford University Said School of Business and on the National Trustees Council of America’s Promise.

Registration for the event is required, and can be completed at www.unitedwaymidlands.org/symposium-registration

WHAT IS THE WLC?
The Women’s Leadership Council (WLC) is a powerful network of caring women who invest their time, talent and resources to explore and address critical issues facing the Omaha-Bellevue-Council Bluffs metropolitan area.

HOW DO WE ACCOMPLISH THIS?
Educate. Volunteer. Invest.
The WLC has a unique model of targeted educational and volunteer opportunities that assist our members in gaining deeper, first-hand knowledge of the issues that face our metropolitan area. Prepared with this heightened understanding of not only the needs, but the solutions, WLC members strengthen our community and make a positive difference through their investment in the work of United Way.

WHO QUALIFIES FOR MEMBERSHIP?
The generous support of a Tocqueville Society ($10,000+) or a Bridgebuilders Society contribution of $2,500 or more automatically qualifies female donors for membership in the WLC.

DAY of ACTION