



LOCAL NEWS

United Way honors Community Builders

April 18, 2019 • [0 Comments](#)

At the 17th annual United Way Community Builders' Reception, The Spirit of Caring Award was presented to Susan Sadecki

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The 17th annual United Way Community Builders' Reception was held on Thursday, April 11, where several individuals and organizations were recognized for their dedication to the west central Connecticut region.

President and CPO of the United Way of West Central Connecticut, Donna Osuch, said the theme of this year's event was "Lights, Camera, Action! Let's Talk United." The dinner and reception featured a talk show-style interview process.

"We're having a talk show inside where we'll interview our guests of honor and make it kind of light and fun where we learn about what makes them live united, why they live united, and what's special," said Osuch.

Event host Jena Doolittle has been with the United Way for over 25 years, and said that she loves how the diversity of programs “touches education, income, and health,” and that it serves the community at every age.

“What keeps me involved is the transparency of the programs,” said Doolittle. “I truly love knowing where my donations go and seeing my donations being used to improve the lives of the people in our communities.”

Doolittle, interviewed the honorees, as well as presented them with their awards, and proclamations signed by Governor Ned Lamont. Five awards were presented during the event.

The Change Maker Award was presented to For Goodness Sake, a furniture bank located in Plainville. Founder Kendra Morales, formed the nonprofit organization six years ago, and just recently, FGS served it's 1,000 client.

“When you set out to do something like this, it's not really what you imagine, you're kind of one foot in front of the other – how do we get this family into my garage? How do I get more exposure out in the agencies around us? How do I get more people donating furniture? And, how do I get volunteers to help me drive the truck besides me every weekend?,” said Morales. “For us, working united isn't just our mission to work with those that are coming out of homelessness or crisis or domestic violence or DCF or mental health, it's important for us to continue the community of giving that we have received so well.”

The Collaborative Excellence Award was presented to the Stock Our Shelters Initiative, and was accepted by Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu on behalf of the City of Bristol.

The mayor explained that the Stock Our Shelters Initiative was born with the help of individuals such as Sarah Larson (Bristol Parks Department), Lindsey Rivers (Bristol Public Works Department), and Cathy Savino (Office of the Mayor)during a Bristol Cares Committee meeting.

During the meeting, the St Vincent de Paul shelter revealed that they were “struggling with the money they needed in order to do the overflow.” During winter months, cold weather protocols can be announced, which allows shelters to take more people than normal, but if there isn't enough room or enough funds to compensate staff, then some people are turned away. This initiative called on all residents of Bristol to bring items for donations with them to the polls on election day.

“On the day of, it became so overwhelming that morning, that we had to launch into emergency mode because we couldn't collect fast enough. At the end of the day, it was great, we had representation from all the high schools, from all age groups,” said Zoppo-Sassu.

The initiative raised over \$5,000 more than needed to open the winter overflow shelter at St Vincent de Paul.

The Rising Star Award was presented to the Productions for Change Initiative, and accepted by Tony Mazzarella of Mazz Media.

The Productions for Change Initiative allows nonprofit organizations a chance to utilize video marketing, in order to reach a greater audience. Brothers Tom and Tony Mazzarella help the organizations but developing a video marketing strategy. This strategy works with the nonprofit organization, in order to educate clients, volunteers, donors, and the public about the nonprofit's goals, causes, and accomplishments.

The Spirit of Caring Award was presented to Susan Sadecki, president of the Main Street Community Foundation.

Sadecki, who spends many hours volunteering, offered advice to young people as they looking for volunteering opportunities. In her opinion, when you volunteer “you’re going to get a lot more from it than that organization is going to gain from your talent and your treasure.” She suggests finding an organization that aligns with your personal passions such as environmental conservation or stocking local food pantries.

“Find an organization that aligns with your passion and do that,” said Sadecki. “As a young individual moving into the workforce, you are going to be the talent that the local employers are going to want to higher, because they want to higher those individuals who aren’t just there for the job, but they bring something else to the organization to make that company a better company because they care about their community.”

And, the Youth Live United Award was presented for the second time. Kaidyn Sigmund of Bristol, Sam Dorman of Burlington, Dale Neyra of Plainville, and Isabella Christiana of Plymouth – representing the towns served by the United Way of West Central Connecticut: Bristol, Burlington, Plainville, Plymouth, and Terryville – were recognized for their volunteer efforts.

“Oh it means so many things,” said Osuch on what it means to “Live United.” She said, “It means looking around and helping those who might need it if I can do so. The little things like shoveling our neighbor’s driveway, working together to maybe cleanup a park, or, bringing folks together like this to celebrate. It’s about helping those who might need it and celebrating the good things together – together we’re stronger.”

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