

Meeting Central Florida's Challenges & Changes

Orlando Sentinel publisher **Kathy Waltz** sees the potential in our communities —and urges us all to see how Heart of Florida United Way plays a part in supporting that vision of what Central Florida can be.

By Michele Plant

Our work and home lives are busier and more complicated than ever. Our community is growing and changing at a rapid pace. We want news and information about our community and our world 24 hours a day.

No one knows about the changes in Central Florida and the media better than *Orlando Sentinel* Publisher **Kathy Waltz**, who leads the company that publishes the community's daily newspaper, *OrlandoSentinel.com*, *El Sentinel* and several weekly and monthly publications and web sites.

As important as her work is, her outside involvement in the Central Florida community is just as important. "We live and work in a vibrant, growing community," says Waltz. "It's our responsibility to make it a better place for all of us, to address the community's challenges and to get involved and help those who need it most."

Heart of Florida United Way

Soon after she arrived in Orlando in 2000, Waltz joined the Heart of Florida United Way's Board of Directors. Today, she serves as the organization's Campaign Chair.

"I've worked at four newspapers in the past thirty years and have always contributed to United Way through payroll deduction," Waltz says. "The organization is important to Central Florida residents because it raises money locally and, most importantly, distributes money locally. People can give generously to United Way, confident that the money is being allocated and spent wisely."

As campaign chair, Waltz's goal is to engage the community to help raise much-needed financial resources. During a recent visit to two agencies that receive funding from United Way (Second Harvest Food



Waltz spends time with a young mother & her daughter who are in the BETA Center's residential program.

Bank and BETA Center), she was able to see these vital services in action.

Community Service Firsthand

"It's one thing to read about the challenges our community and its residents face, but, if you visit a United Way-supported agency, you see it firsthand," Waltz says. "You also see the work of great organizations whose sole purpose is providing assistance to those in need. You never know when a loved one, neighbor or co-worker could be impacted by the programs United Way helps to fund."

In 2006, approximately 450 local businesses participated in United Way's annual workplace giving campaign, in which employees have



Waltz helps unload donated goods at Second Harvest Food Bank.

Photos by Brian Fox Photography

the option to donate through payroll deduction to United Way. In the massive warehouse at Second Harvest Food Bank, rows of food and supplies line the walls, much of it donated by local businesses. In turn, Second Harvest helps supply food to more than 450 programs in Central Florida. Clients arrive every few minutes to shop for necessities, and Waltz speaks with them about the importance of the items provided.

Waltz's next stop was BETA Center. There, she met a young mother in the organization's residential program who was featured in an *Orlando Sentinel* article and was looking forward to meeting Waltz. In turn, she couldn't wait to say hello to the young woman's baby daughter who appeared to be enamored with her audience.

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Not Just an Honorary Position

"What's amazing about Kathy is that she doesn't look at her role as Campaign Chair as an honorary position," says **Robert H. Brown**, president and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way. "We've held numerous conversations over the years about those in need, and her passion to help was evident. Since she already spends a great deal of time in the community, she now promotes the idea of workplace giving campaigns in her meetings. We couldn't have asked for a better advocate to lead this year's campaign."

Waltz sees Orlando as an "adolescent," not yet completely grown but with a big and bright future. In the seven years she's lived here, she's noticed an increased sense of optimism and a belief that the region is capable of doing great things. In order to do so, the community will rely on a strong workforce, excellent schools and safe and healthy neighborhoods.

Waltz is passionate about helping to create and sustain the necessary support for our burgeoning area. "As more and more people move to our region, the need in our community will continue to grow," she says.

"I challenge every person to get to know our United Way, visit some of

the agencies to gain a greater perspective on our community's needs and then get involved," Waltz adds. "Payroll deduction is convenient. You may not even miss that contribution each paycheck, but it makes a big difference to the organizations supported by United Way."

A baby born with developmental challenges, a senior who can no longer drive or prepare meals, a family struggling to find affordable housing: United Way served nearly 400,000 people in Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties last year alone.

A favorite quote of Waltz's is from Booker T. Washington: "If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else." She adds, "That's what your United Way contribution does."

Visit HFUW.org for more information. ■