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EDITORIAL

Giving in hard times

It would have disappointing, though not surprising, if this year's campaign by the United Way of Hampshire County had fallen well short of its goal of raising \$1.225 million. Though the local and national economies are showing signs of life, the recession has taken a toll on those who live in this county, both in jobs lost and in ongoing worries about the future.

Taking all of that into account, officials at the Northampton-based agency set only a modest increase in their campaign goal this year — an extra \$25,000, for a total of \$1.225 million.

It now appears the campaign is within reach of its goal — and that is good news for the many people who are served by the 27-community based agencies that receive funding from the United Way.

Last month, United Way CEO John Ebbets announced that the organization was seeking \$10,000 in additional donations to reach its goal by the end of the fiscal year on June 30. So far, 99 percent of the amount sought has been collected or pledged.

"To be this close," he said then, "we think we'll be able to push it over the top." The ability to do that, he said, reflected the fact that "we live in a truly special community inhabited by a great number of people willing to put up both their money and their time during a time of need."

It's also worth noting that the successful campaign reflects some smart strategic moves. One boost was a \$25,000 challenge grant from Mirage Studios of Northampton, whose founders created the Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtles. Mirage matched any first-time donations to the United Way, along with increased workplace donations by previous givers, up to \$25,000.

To close the campaign, United Way staffers are reaching out to donors they haven't yet heard from, making other calls and working with business people, like Nancy Donato of J. Rich Clothing for Men in Northampton. Donato has promised to give a minimum of \$1,000 to



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the United Way after running a Father's Day promotion in her store this weekend.

After the last donation comes in, those who work with the United Way will be able to turn their attention to their core purpose — turning over the money they've raised to the agencies who work on the front lines. This month, agencies are receiving their final monthly disbursements from the campaign that wrapped up a full year ago.

Those helped by the United Way are some of the most vulnerable among us. They are women and children who have suffered domestic violence; the families who come to area survival centers needing food and basic supplies; the homeless who need shelter; young boys and girls who need mentors; and many more.

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final push — reflects well on the United Way's leadership, its dedicated volunteers and the generosity of those who live in Hampshire County.

Even in hard times, people who have made it a habit to give back through the United Way have stayed with the drive. Some have by necessity given less; others, seeing the need, are giving more. The local campaign is lucky to have a corps of reliable donors, many of whom have been backing their United Way for decades.

The nonprofits in our Valley who do so much to lift the quality of life for all need those donors badly. They also need to win new support from people who have not yet established personal or corporate habits of giving.

Turtle power can only do so much. It's people power that matters.