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The common good

I live in this community, and I wanted to give back to it.

Those are the words of Richard Moodie, who last week donated \$200,000 to the Northampton Survival Center.

In our opinion Richard Moodie is not a rich man. He's retired now after working many years in various housekeeping jobs at the Northampton State Hospital. When he came into some money, he wanted to share it.

Having served as a volunteer at the survival center's food pantry, he understands the needs of those struggling to feed themselves and their families. The gift will be used to expand the pantry's quarters on Prospect Street, which serves 4,000 low-income people in Hampshire County, and distributes 2,000 pounds of food a day.

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Richard Moodie's reason for giving echoes the "Live United" motto of the United Way of Hampshire County, which last week launched its 2010 fund drive. The United Way is about community; those who can give help others in need.

The needs are real. Hampshire County already has a poverty rate of 12.5 percent and that number was posted before the current recession, which has seen too many of our neighbors lose jobs or have hours or wages reduced. As we've noted in the past, according to the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts, working families in the Pioneer Valley have the lowest earnings anywhere in the

state.

The United Way serves as a fund-raising agent for 27 agencies that deliver services in three critical areas: health and safety, children and families, and economic security. Agencies include Friends of Children, the People's Institute, Amherst Family Center, the American Red Cross, Safe Passage, the food pantries in Amherst and Northampton and the Easthampton Community Center, among others.

The United Way guarantees to donors that what's invested here goes to work here and that the programs receiving United Way funds meet standards for community service and fiscal responsibility.

Last year, despite a difficult economy, the United Way met its goal of raising \$1.2 million. The drive was helped with a challenge of \$10,000 from Florence Savings Bank.

This year's goal of \$1,225,000 will not be easy, but it has received a boost of \$25,000 from Mirage Studios, the Northampton-based marketing arm of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, the comic book heroes who were created here 25 years ago.

While those corporate gifts help jump-start the drive, the reality is that the money raised every year by the United Way comes from thousands of small donations. One of Richard Moodie's goals was to inspire others to give back to the community as much as they are able. The United Way offers one easy way to leverage contributions of any size to advance the common good.