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THRIVING TOGETHER



SPRING
2026

ON THE COVER EARTH DAY CITYWIDE CLEANUP



Left: Rockford Lutheran; Right: Milestone. On the Cover: CEJA Pre-Apprenticeship Program (hosted by Goodwill); Severson Dells Nature Center; BMO & Coronado Theater; Earth from space*

More than 900 volunteers turned out over three days (April 22–24) for the Rockford Earth Day Citywide Cleanup, organized by United Way Rock River Valley in partnership with the City of Rockford, Winnebago County, and Go Rockford. It was an incredible day of community action.

This cleanup was more than a litter pick. It was a statement about who Rockford is. As the nation marks 250 years, this day was about service – and about making that spirit of showing up for each other not just a moment, but a habit that builds a stronger community for the next 250.

TEAMWORK IN ACTION

When we put out the call for volunteers, we were optimistic, but the response exceeded our expectations!

Teams fanned out across Rockford, tackling everything from riverbanks and creek corridors to school grounds, park trails, and downtown streets. A portion of the cleanup was focused along the route of the second annual IRONMAN race, scheduled for Sunday, June 14, 2026.

22+ Over 22 organizations participated, bringing together businesses, nonprofits, schools, faith communities, and neighborhood groups.

918 Total number of residents, of all ages, who pitched in to clean up!

*In the spirit of Earth Day, we'd like to give a special shout out to NASA and the Artemis II mission. The cover photo shows our whole planet, quiet and luminous against the darkness of deep space. Ten days of teamwork that reminded the world what's possible when we work together. If that's not the United Way spirit, we don't know what is. *Photo: NASA Artemis II crew, April 2026*



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JULIE BOSMA
President & CEO

LOOKING AHEAD, TOGETHER

You know that feeling when you have so much to say, you're not sure where to start? That's where I find myself this spring.

Legacy donors. Massive book donations. Big winners. Volunteers who show up just because it's the right thing to do. Neighbors who grabbed gloves and got to work on Earth Day. It has been that kind of season at United Way Rock River Valley.

I could fill this whole page trying to capture it, but the truth is, the stories do it better than I ever could. So I'm stepping aside and letting this issue do the talking.

Dig in. I think you'll love what you find.

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Dr. Ebony Wrenn, *Jackson Charter School*

Edward Zurowski, Jr., *APWU Local 79*

VOLUNTEERS PLANT SEEDS THAT GROW FOREVER



In April, we had the joy of celebrating the people who make this work possible – our volunteers. From sorting books to leading workplace campaigns, offering boardroom expertise to creating fundraising events, every contribution moves us forward. United Way Rock River Valley's goals for this community are bold. Because of you, they're within reach. Thank you, truly.



UNITED WAY 'TOGETHER WE THRIVE' SWEEPSTAKES WINNERS



Our Together We Thrive Campaign Sweepstakes has officially wrapped, and we couldn't be more grateful for everyone who participated.

Congratulations to our Grand Prize winner, Phillip an employee of City of Rockford, who took home a staycation package valued at over \$500, including a two-night stay at Fairfield by Marriott, brunch at Thunder Bay Grill, lunch at Raising Cane's, and a Target gift card.

Want to see the full winner list and the generous businesses who made it possible? Visit unitedwayrrv.org/sweepstakes-2025-26



BOOKS FOR BRIGHTER FUTURES

BOOK DRIVE COLLECTION

We set a goal of 2,000 books. The community delivered roughly 9,100!

Every book will find a reader through our free community book fair on May 14 and direct distribution to Rockford Public School classrooms.

Book Drive Highlights: Illinois State Representatives Maurice West and Dave Vella personally collected and delivered more than 3,300 books between them. Follett Content donated 2,000 books in a single contribution, single-handedly meeting our original goal. Alpine Kiwanis Club, led by Mel Welch, added over 1,000 more. And Henry, a local 6th grader, collected 556 books entirely on his own.

CELEBRATING LEGACY DONORS

Legacy is "the long-lasting impact of particular events or actions that took place in the past." In line with that, our United Way Legacy Donors are men and women whose generosity is inspired by their parents' faithful gifts of time, talent, and treasure. It has had a long-lasting impact on them. We are proud to share the stories of three such families.



Dorothy and Paul Baits

When Stephen and Dorothy Baits married, they agreed Steve would work to support the family and Dorothy would volunteer for the betterment of the community. That reflected the volunteer environment in which they were raised. Notably, Steve's mother served 14 years as a University of Michigan regent and Dorothy's mother was hailed Volunteer of the Year at 80. Steve served on agency Boards, including United Way. What a delight that their sons and daughters have carried on that giving spirit.

"It's nice to be very proud of your children," Dorothy noted with a warm smile. In the communities where they live, they keep the giving legacy alive, supporting causes close to their heart. Rockford is blessed that after remarkably successful years at the University of Illinois, son Paul followed in his father's footsteps and joined the team of Sundstrand engineers. He and his wife Teri also generously continue the family legacy of volunteerism and philanthropy, benefiting organizations that have touched their lives, "and United Way, of course," he said sincerely and summed it up saying, "It's all payback – I'm lucky," This too reflects his mother's way of thinking as she shared, "If life has treated you well and you are financially comfortable, you give back. I'm thankful to have the ability to do it."



Susan Reno

Susan warmly shares being generous makes her feel good, especially when her giving helps kids, "that feels the best." She fondly recalls that the emphasis on helping children comes directly from the example of her mother and father, Janice and Roger. They believed everyone deserves an education and that the little ones are our future.

From her mother's annual volunteer work at Colonial Village during the Christmas season delighting children with magical holiday fun, to her father's service as a Board director for organizations benefiting children, she witnessed their commitment in action. Her parents always coupled those gifts of time with financial support and entrusted Susan with the continuation of that giving through her management of the Guy Reno Foundation, which her father named after his father. In this way, the three-generation commitment to making life better for those in need continues today. Susan finds the United Way Literacy Initiative especially exciting because it serves children through education, a true reflection of her parents' values.



Dave and Jeanne Rydell

When asked about the legacy of giving in his family, Dave Rydell immediately shares stories of his parents, Elvin and Marjorie, giving generously to the Lutheran Church they attended and many local charities. Following his father into the business world, Dave joined the Bergstrom team where he is currently the Chairman of the Board. It was there that Dave witnessed his father running annual United Way workplace campaigns and encouraging the participation of employees.

Years later, Dave successfully chaired the community-wide United Way Campaign and currently keeps the Bergstrom campaign running strong. In addition to this leadership role, Dave has served on a wide range of Boards, sharing his time and wisdom. Dave and his wife Jeanne continue the Rydell Family Foundation in memory of his mother and father, assuring their legacy of philanthropy. Dave and Jeanne also chair our Tocqueville Society which recognizes donors at the \$10,000 level and above. Their commitment to God, country, family and community is a beautiful legacy that honors the past and builds the future.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

If you're a Legacy Donor, a person who has been inspired to give through the example of someone else, we'd love to hear your story! Please contact Kay Larrick at kay@unitedwayrrv.org to share this special impact on your life.