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Monday, October 3, 2005

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## Looking back to our basics will move community forward

AS I SEE IT

By Lois Green

As United Way of Central Massachusetts celebrates its 85th year, I am reminded of how many things have changed since our organization first opened its doors in 1920, at the same time, comforted by the things that have not changed.

A quick glance at our lives today shows many changes. Technology has advanced and lives are busier. Population has grown and neighborhoods are different then they were years ago. At that time, people often spoke of the American Dream — opportunities, hope and pride. Where is that in our community today? Has it disappeared? Or is it just forgotten? More importantly what can we, as a community, do to bring it back?

We need to go back to the basics, where neighbors help neighbors and the community serves as a network of support for those in need. A closer look at the past 85 years reveals a strong foundation that will help us do that. Though many changes have taken place over time, there are also several things that have not.

What has not changed is the purpose of United Way and the caring community's generosity. United Way of Central Massachusetts is still doing what we set out to do 85 years ago, helping those in need by working with local resources to make our community stronger. The founding companies of our community Saint-Gobain (formerly Norton), Morgan, UnumProvident (Mass Protective Assn), Allmerica (State Mutual) and Wyman-Gordon continue to be strong partners with us today. We value and praise their continued support of United Way and our community. And the people in our community continue to come together during times of crisis, as recently witnessed through the Hurricane Katrina efforts.

The devastation of Hurricane Katrina revealed the struggles of the poor families in New Orleans and evoked an enormous amount of support throughout our community and our nation. The repercussions of this disaster clearly demonstrated the importance of a strong network of community support for children, youth, families and those in need. Thousands of people need our help today and they will need it tomorrow.

Our community's generosity for victims of the hurricane has been wonderful. And while I'm filled with pride, seeing how charitable our great community can be when moved by the devastating consequences of a catastrophic event, I am also concerned. I am concerned about the impact it could have on our community's ability to meet the needs of our neighbors in the Central Massachusetts area. Your help is essential, not just in times of national emergencies, but also for the struggles that face our community every day.

Thousands of people in our community are in need — they need things that many of us take for granted every day. As a community, we need to support those needs and address the root of the problem so we can create sustainable change in our community. Research shows that children in need grow up to be adults in need. So, as we support those with basic needs, we cannot forget about the impressionable children, youth and families of our community.

As we work to improve our own quality of life, it's essential that we remember the needs of our neighbors. By taking care of those in need, we're not only helping them now, we're preparing our community for a strong and

vibrant future. A future that provides a safe, healthy and nurturing community where basic needs are met and children, youth and families have the opportunities to thrive and succeed — and fulfill the American Dream.

The American Dream is one of the most precious ideas throughout the world. It symbolizes opportunity, community and responsibility to make life better for future generations.

Together, we must make this dream real again for all members of our community.

Lois Green is the president and CEO of the United Way of Central Massachusetts.

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