

Union County New Albany Initiative to Excel (UNITE)
Documentation of Achievement and Leadership
For Consideration of the
2011 James Hugh Ray Community Affiliate Award

In 2002 when Union County citizens answered the challenge by CREATE to establish a community foundation, Union County New Albany Initiative to Excel (UNITE) was established. It remains the only community foundation where individuals and groups have the opportunity to make charitable contributions that are used to meet the needs of their communities and improve the quality of life for the citizens of New Albany and Union County not only for the present but for the future.

Active, Engaged Board of Directors

UNITE is governed by a 15 member Board of Directors. Members are elected for three-year terms and the diverse membership represents all aspects of communities which they serve. Members readily participate in meetings and serve on committees. The first Board of Directors was elected in 2003 and more than 30 individuals have served on the Board.

Giving Board

Board members are expected to contribute to UNITE during their tenure on the Board. Many members are donors before serving on the Board and most continue to contribute following their service on the Board. Many contributions are made as end-of-the-year gifts. Currently the rate of participation is approximately 94%.

Executive Director

The Main Street Director assisted with the establishment of UNITE, and handled administrative duties until a paid executive director was employed in 2005 and served through 2010. The current Executive Director was employed in 2011. The Executive Director is responsible for preparing for Board meetings, handling correspondence, seeking funds, and representing UNITE. The Executive Director is also expected to contribute to UNITE.

Regular Board Meetings

The Board of Directors has met monthly since UNITE was established. The Board currently meets at noon on the third Monday. Even though many of the members have demanding professional schedules, attendance averages approximately 80%.

The President and Executive Director work together to develop the agenda which includes financial reports, President's report, and Executive Director's Report. Meetings usually include discussion of increasing visibility in the community and fundraising. Minutes are sent electronically following each meeting.

Growth in Endowment Fund

In addition to the initial \$100,000 challenge grant from CREATE, \$429,740.42 has been contributed to UNITE since 2002. A local family offered a \$100,000 challenge grant in 2005, and contributions

surpassed the challenge. The majority of the contributions come from individuals. Contributions from local businesses comprise the next largest source of support. Some local civic clubs include UNITE in their annual budgets; there is potential for considerable growth in this category. The donor base includes approximately 200. Personal contact to potential donors has been the primary and most effective means of raising funds. Fundraising has included a raffle of a motorcycle, and other means have been discussed.

Visibility in Community

Board members are reminded each month of opportunities in the community where their presence will generate support for UNITE.

Advertisements are purchased in local, two annual publications that are used to promote New Albany and Union County and are available for general distribution. Articles routinely appear in local newspapers.

In 2011, a large, attractive sign was prominently mounted on the exterior of New Albany's Welcome Center.

Grant recipients are asked to use the UNITE logo in publicizing their activities.

In 2011, UNITE launched its own website www.unitecommunityfoundation.com. In addition to providing information about UNITE, the website which will be updated regularly includes a rotation of pictures including activities supported with grant funds, UNITE events, and board members. In addition to providing information about UNITE, grant applications can be submitted on-line.

Evidence of Taking a Leadership Role

UNITE Board Members and the Executive Director are known for the various leadership roles they fulfill throughout the community. The most obvious leadership role is demonstrated through the solicitation of funds to grow the endowment to ensure funds will be available for community needs for generations to follow.

Additionally, one of the grants awarded supports Leadership Union County. This program is designed to ensure the continuity of leadership in Union County and its local communities by engaging individuals in activities promoting personal and professional growth, leadership skills, team building, community awareness, and project development.

Attendance and participation in affiliate meetings, state of the region, summits, and other local and regional meetings are indicative of those in leadership roles.

Effective, Publicized Grant-Making

UNITE initiated a grant program in 2003 by awarding \$6,000 to 14 organizations. In 2011, \$23,960 was awarded to 10 organizations. Since 2003 \$178,296.38 has been returned to the community through grants awarded to approximately 30 non-profit organizations. Grant recipients include the following: Boys & Girls Club of North Mississippi, Good Samaritan Center (Food Pantry), Lighthouse Enrichment Center, Union County Museum/Historical Society, Magnolia Civic Center, Junior Auxiliary of New Albany, American Red Cross, New Haven Center for Special Needs Adults, Union County Habitat for Humanity, Union County Library, Myrtle School, New Albany City Beautification, Union County

Literacy Council, Northeast Mississippi Community College, Park Along the River, Ingomar School, New Albany Garden Club, Rainbow Learning Center, East Union Attendance Center, Tallahatchie Riverfest, Keep Union County/New Albany Beautiful, New Albany Main Street Association, Tallahatchie River Players, First Choice, Parkgate Pregnancy Clinic, Tupelo Symphony, Helping Hands of Union County, Leadership Union County, and Union County Master Gardeners.

This diverse range of recipients utilize UNITE funds to

- buy books for those who can read and to teach those who cannot read to read,
- provide a safe place for children after school and during the summer
- assist with tutorial programs
- supply food and utility assistance to hundreds of individuals in need
- enhance cultural opportunities in the community
- enrich the lives of special needs adults
- purchase supplies for volunteers to repair the homes of the elderly and needy
- preserve the history of the community
- beautify parks, city streets, and communities
- promote participation in fine arts
- attract visitors to New Albany and Union County
- aid in disaster relief
- sponsor community festivals
- conduct children's theater camp

Relationships with Professional Advisors

In the past UNITE has provided opportunities for professional advisors to share their expertise for the betterment of the community. Professionals readily make themselves available when needed and networking is encouraged.

Attendance at Affiliate Meetings

Board members are reminded of affiliate meetings and are encouraged to attend. The Executive Director also attends the affiliate meetings. UNITE is always represented at these meetings. Information is shared at board meetings for those who could not attend.

In 2012, UNITE will observe its 10th anniversary and will celebrate the achievements of the past ten years. Realizing what has been accomplished in these few years inspires community leaders to move forward with their dreams and desires to continue to provide for the future of New Albany and Union County.