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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TWO UNITED WAYS OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY ASSESSING MERGER

In a move to make operations more cost-effective and to amplify community impact, United Way of Northern Chautauqua County (UWNCC) and United Way of Southern Chautauqua County (UWSCC) are exploring a merger into one county-wide organization.

This initiative follows from growing collaboration between the two nonprofits. For example, UWNCC and UWSCC have realized cost savings in recent years through shared employees and shared service agreements. For several years now, the two United Ways have jointly administered the federal Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program in the county, providing free tax preparation services for those who qualify. Additionally, both organizations fund some of the same county-wide agencies. The growing overlap initiated discussion of a possible merger in late 2023.

“By leveraging the strengths of the two United Ways into one, the proposed consolidation stands to bring about increased organizational effectiveness, a better donor experience, and enhanced support for the 34 partner agencies we fund,” explained Amy Rohler, executive director of the United Way of Southern Chautauqua County. Rohler also currently serves in a part-time administrative role for the United Way of Northern Chautauqua County.

After preliminary conversations, the merger task force was formed in December 2023, to more fully consider the creation of a single countywide United Way. The representative group is comprised of three board members from each organization. The group has sought feedback from partner agencies, financial supporters, municipal leaders and stakeholders from throughout the county.

The taskforce drafted a “Values Proposition” which outlines the reasoning for a merged United Way of Chautauqua County. That document can be found on the website of each organization, as can answers to a list of frequently asked questions about the prospective merger.

The United Ways also hired the New York Council of Nonprofits (NYCON) to advise them on the legal process for a merger, with funding from the Ralph C. Sheldon Foundation. NYCON has provided consulting services for dozens of nonprofit organizations throughout New York State, including other United Way organizations.

In June, the board of directors of each United Way will review and vote on a merger proposal, as will the membership of UWSCC in July. If the proposal is approved, the two agencies will launch an initial affiliation and begin to work on a joint, county-wide fundraising campaign for 2024. Ultimately, a formal merger application would need to be reviewed and approved by the New York State Attorney General’s office, which would likely complete its decision-making in 2025.

The United Way of Northern Chautauqua County and the United Way of Southern Chautauqua County are actively seeking public input on their potential merger. Anyone with comments and questions can call Amy Rohler at (716) 483-1561 or email her at ARohler@uwayscc.org. UWNCC Board President Tyler Gotowkacan be reached by emailing TGotowka@lawleyinsurance.com

Each United Way in Chautauqua County began as a local "Community Chest" 100 years ago, and in the time since have continued to serve their respective halves of the county with the same mission: To mobilize the caring power of the community to help better the lives of all residents.

About The United Ways of Chautauqua County

United Way of Northern Chautauqua County began in the 1930s as the Dunkirk-Fredonia Community Chest, Inc. Since that time, its mission has grown and evolved to meet the changing needs of the community. United Way of Southern Chautauqua County began as the Jamestown Community Chest in 1920. Since that time, it worked to mobilize the community to help every person and family improve their lives.