UA Cares sees a 75% jump in employee volunteers

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The 2023 UA Cares workplace giving campaign saw a 75% increase in the number of employees who volunteered their time. The campaign, which ran from Oct. 2-Nov. 10, drew 131 faculty and staff members for seven service projects just for University faculty and staff.

UA Cares also brought in $191,000 in monetary donations from payroll deductions, department and unit fundraisers and one-time donations. The average amount given through payroll deduction was $354.55, up from $346.49 the previous year. The money will support 201 charitable causes, including 127 University programs and 74 community nonprofits.

"UA Cares initiatives definitely build a sense of community and help us be forward-thinking about what problems the community is facing now and may face in the future," said Nick Hilton, director of community relations in the Office of Government and Community Relations and coordinator of UA Cares. "People want to be part of the solution."

The campaign, which began in 2004, raises funds for University programs through the University of Arizona Foundation[1] and for nonprofit organizations through the United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona. For the first time, this year's campaign had two honorary co-chairs – Hope Noriega, enrollment counselor with Arizona International, and Brian Mayer, professor in the School of Sociology.

"Participating in the workplace giving campaign really opened my eyes to all the great nonprofits that are in our community and all the amazing missions they stand for," Noriega said. "As for promoting it to my colleagues, I think that helped inspire more people to participate, which I know will make a big difference in our community. Thanks to everyone who decided to donate a small piece of what they work hard for to improve an issue they are passionate about. A little can go a long way."

The change from one to two honorary co-chairs will be permanent, with future campaigns being led by one faculty member and one staff member.

Hilton said the success of the annual campaign is due in large part to the UA Cares ambassadors that help promote the campaign and organize events in their units. In the latest campaign, there were 130 ambassadors.

"Our campaign really belongs to the employees, so it should be run by employees," Hilton said. "The amazing UA Cares ambassadors are really the engines behind our campaign and we're so grateful for their commitment to the community."

Highlighting worthy causes

Another change this year was that the campaign spotlighted specific giving opportunities and service projects. The highlighted organizations included the El Rio Foundation[2], which supports El Rio Health programs such as a homeless outreach program, and the Primavera Foundation[3], which provides resources and support to help individuals and families escape poverty. The campaign also promoted the United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona[4], the Employee Emergency Fund[5], which provides financial aid to employees facing temporary hardship as a result of unexpected emergency expenses, and the University of Arizona Campus Pantry[6], which distributes food to employees and students at no cost.

(Visit this photo gallery to see several of the entries[7] in the Office of the Provost's annual Pumpkin Crafting Contest, which raised $1,100 for the Campus Pantry.)

The most popular University programs among donors included the Arizona Assurance Program[8], which provides financial and support services to students from low-income households; Arizona Public Media; the Dorm Stipend Fund[9], which helps low-income and first-generation students pay their dorm rent; and the Aurelie Sheehan Memorial Scholarship in Creative Writing[10].

The volunteer opportunities reserved for University employees included garden and campus beautification projects at several Tucson schools, improvements at the PAWSitively CATS shelter and several projects at Pima Animal Care Center.

Looking forward

There will be more opportunities to give this semester. The annual UA 4 Food campaign[11] to fight food insecurity throughout Southern Arizona will run from March 11-April 8. There is also a blood drive planned for March 21 in the Student Union Memorial Center bookstore in partnership with the American Red Cross. Noriega and Mayer will continue as honorary UA Cares co-chairs for those events.
In addition to the events planned for this spring, campaign organizers are working with University Information Technology Services to make giving more flexible, Hilton said.

"We recognize that people may want to start payroll deductions at different times of the year and we're working on making that an option in future years," he said. "We're also hoping to make it easier for employees to manage their deductions and increase or decrease them however they see fit."

Hilton is also looking for employees to join the planning committee for the next UA Cares campaign. Those interested can email him at hilton@arizona.edu.

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