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United Way hosts Community Builders volunteer kick-off event

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More than 100 civic minded young professionals from the region's leading real estate firms recently attended United Way's Community Builders kick-off at the Ames Hotel. Organized by seven United Way Community Builders volunteers, including co-chairs Ben Sayles of Holliday Fenoglio Fowler, L.P. and Wyndor DePetro of Marcus Partners, the event aimed to recruit volunteers for a burgeoning number of projects around the city. Michael Durkin, United Way president and CEO, attended to show the organization's support for the group's work to transform neighborhoods through their skills.

In 2010, United Way mobilized the Emerging Leaders in the Real Estate sector into a group of committed and dedicated volunteers called Community Builders. This group of young professionals gives their time and energy to hands-on and skills-based volunteer opportunities.

By 2011, Community Builders had developed a 400-person network of volunteers and raised \$6,500 to support United Way programs. During the annual kick-off event, Community Builders stated their goal for 2012 is to double their fundraising and expand their volunteer network through recruitment events and individual outreach.

"United Way's Community Builders is off to a strong start in 2012, having already raised \$3,000 and it's only January," said DePetro.

In addition to fundraising, Sayles highlighted the volunteer opportunities available to young real estate professionals.

"There are two main volunteer opportunities we're offering through United Way," Sayles said. "Firstly, hands-on volunteering offers an opportunity for the greatest number of people to get involved quickly and generally take place once a month on Saturday mornings."

The hands-on opportunities generally include light landscaping or painting affordable housing projects according to Sayles.

Sayles also described skills-based volunteer opportunities that "sets us apart from other volunteer organizations." As skills-based volunteers, the United Way Community Builders donate their professional skills to United Way's CDC partners to forward projects including construction of affordable housing. Skills-based volunteer opportunities range from purchase and sales or contract negotiations, to project management, design or marketing and sales of affordable properties.

"When you become a Community Builder volunteer," Sayles continued, "you're helping to transform Boston neighborhoods, taking vacant bank-owned foreclosure properties and convert, rehab or develop them into affordable homeowner units for low to moderate-income families for example."

Volunteers are still being sought for the next United Way Community Builders volunteer opportunity: painting the common areas of the Carol Avenue Cooperative in February. This limited-equity coop was developed by the CDC in the mid-1980s and is owned by the residents, all of whom are low-

and moderate-income households, and each of whom has an ownership share.

Young real estate professionals can find out more about United Way's Community Builders by visiting <http://supportunitedway.org/volunteer/community-builders> or by emailing Julie Fletcher Graves at jgraves@supportunitedway.org to sign up. The group is also active on LinkedIn and can be found by searching for UWMBMV Community Builders.

The event was sponsored by Lee Kennedy Co. Inc., Office Resources and Paradigm Properties. United Way Community Builders kick-off hosts also include James Broyer of Boston Capital Real Estate, Jason Denoncourt of Gutierrez Company, Amy Galluzzo of Brown Brothers Harriman & Co., Troy Merkel of McGladrey & Pullen, Dimitrios Pilitsis of AEW Capital Management, Marilyn Shen of Visnick & Caulfield Associates and Scott Wisdom of U.S. Bank Commercial Real Estate.

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