

# Centre County United Way reveals 2013 campaign goal

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by Marjorie Miller

BOALSBURG — The Centre County United Way announced Monday at its annual campaign kickoff that 25 percent of its 2013 goal has been reached.

Held at Tussey Mountain in Boalsburg, the Aug. 19 event featured dinner and remarks from Centre County United Way staff and volunteers, and the reveal of the 2013 campaign goal of \$2.1 million.

Pacesetter Campaign co-chairs Dianna Meckley, Mindy Dillon and Colleen Williams announced the Pacesetter total of \$530,096, which represents 25 percent of the 2013 goal, and will be added to the campaign thermometer.

Aaron King, Bellefonte native and former United States Marine, opened the program by sharing his personal story of how the United Way and its partner agencies have aided his family in numerous ways.



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"With your donations ... it has helped my family," he said.

Wounded during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, King had to re-learn how to walk and talk. When his daughter was born prematurely in 2011, King's family was faced with many challenges, he said.

"She is the biggest fighter that I've ever known," he said.

King said his daughter, who was born at only 2 lbs, 8 ounces, has his mentality, he said, because she "never gave up."

She spent a lot of time in an incubator and in the NICU, he said, and eventually became strong enough to be released to go home.

King said he and his wife didn't think anything was wrong with their daughter, but she wasn't walking or talking. It was recommended that the family check into the United Way for therapy for premature children.

"I remember the amount of anger and frustration my wife and I felt at that time," he said.

King's daughter was evaluated through Strawberry Fields Inc., a United Way agency that supports individuals and families with developmental delays, intellectual disabilities and mental illness, according to its website.

It was determined that King's daughter needed speech and physical therapy, King said. Throughout the process, his daughter persevered.

Because of her strength and drive, King declared his major at Penn State to be rehabilitation in human services, he said.

"After seeing what she went through and that determination that little girl had ... that motivated me," he said.

Four months after therapy, and at 9 months old, King said his daughter could crawl. And in July 2012 she was able to take her first steps, thanks to the help of her therapist. One month later she was completely discharged from physical therapy.

King said his daughter continues to receive speech therapy through Strawberry Fields, and has learned sign language.

King, himself, has been working at Skills of Central PA, a United Way partner agency that serves those with disabilities, and has placed some 500 clients in jobs, he said.

"(Skills clients are the) hardest working individuals you will ever meet," King said.

Community donations to the United Way support Skills and its many services, he said.

"(It) takes a very special person to work in this field," King said about Skills. "You have to have an open heart. You to have to love these guys."

Ending with a quote from former Penn State football coach, the late Joe Paterno, King said the United Way has really come "full circle" with his family. His daughter receives care through Strawberry Fields, a partner of United Way, and he gives back by working at Skills, also a partner of United Way.

"Believe in your heart that you're destined to do great things," he said, quoting Paterno.

George Downsborough, 2013 United Way campaign co-chair, said he is pleased with the Pacesetter total, but "there's still much work over the next five months if we're going to meet our goal."

The grand total of the campaign, which ends Jan. 31, will be announced in February, he said.

"United we can improve lives in Centre County," Downsborough said.

Also at the event, United Way Executive Director Tammy Gentzel spoke, as well as 2013 campaign co-chair Nick Lingenfelter.

The 2013 Pacesetter Campaign included support from 33 local companies and 34 United Way partner agencies, as well as the United Way board and staff.

For more information visit [www.ccunitedway.org](http://www.ccunitedway.org).

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