

Doing right by their city



"Toronto is where we live and we feel we have a responsibility to share and better the lives of others who live here as well."

Geoff and Sandie Beattie say it's their duty

Geoff and Sandie Beattie are clear about why they give to United Way. "Toronto is where we live and we feel we have a responsibility to share and better the lives of others who live here as well," says Geoff.

The Beatties' involvement with United Way was motivated by the inspiring story of Shoba Adore, a child of South Asian immigrants who moved to Braeburn (Rexdale area of Toronto) when she was young. As a teen, she became involved with the youth leadership program offered by the United Way agency, Braeburn Neighbourhood Place. The program helped form the direction of her life and she is now the Executive Director of the organization.

The Beatties were extremely moved by Shoba's story and wanted to assist her organization however they could. What they ended up doing has made a world of difference to many of Toronto's low-income children. For the past three years, the Beatties have made a gift to Braeburn Neighbourhood Place. Because of this gift, Braeburn has been able to enroll twice as many children and youth into its day camp each summer.

It's stories like that of Shoba Adore that remind Geoff and Sandie why Toronto's diversity is so important to the life of their city. According to Geoff, "Toronto's diversity should serve as a prototype for other big cities across the globe. Our support of diverse cultures gives us a tremendous advantage."

The Beatties are proud of Toronto's social support system and the work of United Way. "Toronto has always been realistic and responsive about the social issues that come with big cities," says Geoff. "A huge part of our lives is where we live and United Way clearly recognizes this."

Geoff and Sandie Beattie enjoy the diversity of their city with a visit to Chinatown.



A colourful subway ride



"We're fortunate to be living in a city that's so diverse. It makes us more in touch with our neighbours of the world."

Just one reason why Jean Lam loves Toronto

When Jean Lam arrived in Toronto in the late 1970s from New Brunswick, she was struck by the love her friends had of the city. Toronto was a unique and dynamic place filled with opportunity, and Jean was happy to be here.

But as time wore on, she became increasingly aware of the poverty and homelessness in the city, compelling her to take action. Jean's relationship with United Way began in the early 1980s when she co-chaired a workplace campaign at the Ontario Ministry of Energy. It was this initial experience that showed her the impact United Way could have on the city. Since that time, she served as a United Way board member and active participant on several United Way committees.

There's a reason why Jean has remained so faithful to the efforts of United Way all these years. Quite simply, she cares about the city she lives in. One aspect of Toronto that brings her great satisfaction is its multicultural fabric. "When I ride the subway each day, I'm happy to see the faces of so many different ethnicities," she says. "We're fortunate to be living in a city that's so diverse. It makes us more in touch with our neighbours of the world."

When looking to the future, Jean is convinced that the potential of our city lies in the active engagement of its residents and collaboration amongst all sectors, including business and government. "I hope that, in time, we will have more natural, spontaneous networks for positive change. With this, I also hope that there are more physical gathering places for mobilizing people and that all Torontonians feel their voice is being heard."

And when it comes to Toronto's neighbourhoods, Jean wants all Toronto residents to experience a positive sense of place about where they live. "Whether it's the Annex or Flemingdon Park, I want people to be proud of their community."



Jean Lam in the dappled sunlight of a community playground on the Esplanade.

Making a difference from A-Z



"Giving to United Way makes sense to us because it allocates funds to so many different social causes."

How Michelle and Michael Levy make their time and dollars count

Michelle and Michael Levy are well-known for their support of Toronto's arts and culture scene. But they also care a great deal about Toronto's social issues, which is why they are such generous supporters of United Way.

"Giving to United Way makes sense to us because it allocates funds to so many different social causes," says Michelle Levy. "No one issue is more important than the other. Care for the elderly, after-school programs for children and shelters are all top of mind for Michael and me." This is why we're happy to support all efforts of United Way."

When Michael Levy made the move from Hamilton to Toronto in 1971, he was excited to be a part of such a vibrant city. But in the last thirty years or so, he's witnessed a societal shift that causes him concern. "Social issues have become more visibly pronounced," he says. "Despite the promising rebirth of our cultural institutions and a steady economy, there is a definitive rise in violence and poverty. This points to an ever-increasing need for United Way."

Both Michelle and Michael have a positive outlook for the future of Toronto but they're quick to note; "Change takes time."



Michelle and Michael Levy in Toronto's fabled neighbourhood of Cabbagetown.

The young blood



"I want Toronto to be more interconnected. I want communities to be there for one another. I want my city to thrive economically and socially."

Leigh-Ann McGowan represents a new generation of leaders

According to young lawyer, Leigh-Ann McGowan, today's young people deserve a little more credit when it comes to social responsibility. "There's a misconception that our generation is returning to an age of greed," she says. "People think we're just interested in the party scene. It's simply not the case."

Leigh-Ann couldn't be more on point. As an active member of United Way's GenNext Cabinet for the past three years, Leigh-Ann is surrounded by young people who have a fervent desire to make a difference in their community. The GenNext Cabinet was established to initiate a peer-to-peer campaign and outreach strategy geared at individuals aged 21-35. This forward-thinking initiative gives people like Leigh-Ann an opportunity to connect with their community in ways that reflect their own unique interests and mentality.

Having lived in Toronto almost her entire life, Leigh-Ann is strongly in touch with the changes Toronto has seen in recent years. "Lately, I've sensed a greater feeling of pride amongst Torontonians, which is great, but homelessness remains a big issue that needs to be tackled. With so much prosperity in this city, there's so much that could be done."

With many years of life ahead of her, the future of Toronto is never far from her mind. When asked about her vision for the city twenty years from now, she's adamant about one thing. "I want Toronto to be more interconnected," she says. "I want communities to be there for one another. I want more comprehensive infrastructure in the form of transit expansion and affordable housing. I want my city to thrive economically and socially."

And she has great faith in United Way's ability to achieve this vision—"The great thing about United Way is that they help so many people in so many different ways. They make sure no one is forgotten."



Leigh-Ann McGowan sits outside one of her favourite coffee shops in the thriving Toronto neighbourhood of Trinity-Bellwoods

A mother's influence



"It's unrealistic to think the city won't need United Way one day."

How a teenage epiphany put Martine Irman on the path to kindness

Martine Irman easily recalls the moment she began giving back to her community. It was all thanks to her mother, a woman living in Montreal who volunteered her time to serving lunch at a home for mentally-challenged youth. Martine was having a typical juvenile adolescent day when her mother decided to "drag her along" to volunteer. The experience put things in perspective for Martine and she's forever grateful for the invaluable life lesson.

United Way is grateful too. Martine is an active contributor to United Way efforts, sitting on various fundraising boards, as well as the board of a United Way agency, Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Martine chooses to assist United Way largely because of its broad outreach capabilities. "I'm so impressed with the dedication of staff and volunteers and the ability to address so many issues in our city. And yet the work is never done. It's unrealistic to think the city won't need United Way one day."

Martine had good impressions of Toronto when she arrived in 1981 but as the years passed, she saw a city struggling with dramatic growth and new challenges. Gun violence and visible poverty were two things that drew her attention. But on the bright side, she witnessed the increase in multiculturalism—a significant victory in the eyes of Martine. "Multiculturalism is the way of the future for our city," she says. "We must continue to embrace it."

When pondering the future of Toronto, Martine offers a simple prescription for a better city—human kindness. "Toronto is a caring city," she says, "but in the future I hope we can care even more. We must continue to encourage and acknowledge acts of kindness and generosity, because in the end, this promotes more of the same behaviour."

With visionaries like Martine, we're well on our way.



Martine Irman kids around with Little Sister, Stephanie Akakapo and Big Sister Hilary Pickering outside Rose Avenue Public School.

Casting a stronger social safety net



"Giving back to the community you live in is important—especially when you're in a position to give."

Dr. Sheela Basrur wants collective effort for the better good of us all

As Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Health, Dr. Sheela Basrur has her hands full to say the least. In the past, she also held the role of Chief Medical Officer of Health for the City of Toronto—a position that exposed her to many of the social challenges faced by the GTA. In spite of her full plate, Sheela still manages to make time for the efforts of United Way.

One of the things that compelled Sheela to donate and give of her time was the United Way posters seen in Toronto's transit system. "They were very effective in bringing home the human reality behind the written campaign," she says. "I saw them and wanted to help. Giving back to the community you live in is important—especially when you're in a position to give."

There's been substantial change in Toronto since Sheela's arrival in 1978. "Homelessness and hunger have become much more visible," she says. This fact brings to mind a visual that has stuck with Sheela since she rented her first apartment in downtown Toronto. "There was a woman who sat on her front step across the street from me," she says. "She always looked downtrodden and stoic but I never saw her panhandle. I never could shake that image." This experience of Sheela's played an indirect role in the professional path she took as a community health specialist—and her interest in supporting United Way.

"I want to see fewer holes in the social safety net and a finer mesh woven by all sectors, including governments, NGOs and local citizens," she says. "I want to see a collective attitude towards collective problems. I know United Way will be a major player in this."



Dr. Sheela Basrur makes a visit to United Way agency, FoodShare, on Eastern Avenue.

Three generations of generosity



"A robust economy, a thriving arts and cultural scene and committed citizens all make for a city that's vibrant, but we also need to cultivate an environment where people from all walks of life feel valued and proud of where they live. To achieve this, we need visionary leadership and most importantly, a shared belief that no one should be left behind."

- Blake Goldring

How the Goldrings have made giving back a family trait

As the United Way of Greater Toronto celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, so too do the Goldrings. The Goldring family has been with United Way since the very beginning. It was 1956 when Cecil Goldring sat on the first board of directors for the United Community Fund. He was a firm believer in the importance of contributing to his community and making it a better place for all. His compassionate philosophy was passed on to his son Charles Warren, who in turn imparted the wisdom to his own son, Blake, who today carries on the family tradition of generously supporting the efforts of United Way.

"Both my father and grandfather felt strongly about giving back to Toronto," says Blake Goldring. "There was always an ardent belief that society functions better when we all take care of one another."

Having lived in Toronto his entire life, Blake has a genuine local's perspective on how his city has evolved since his birth in 1958. "Without question, Toronto has become a world-class city over the years," says Blake. "But with big cities come big challenges. Homelessness is but one of many. United Way is here to address those big challenges."

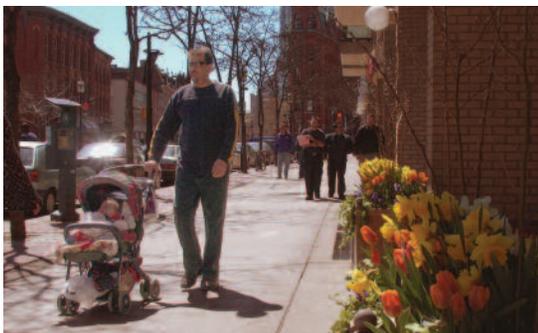
Blake is clearly an optimist who feels that the best years lie ahead for Toronto. "There's great talent in this city. We just have to put it to smart use," he says. And while he believes our city is currently a wonderful place to live, he also feels we need to work on improving it.

With their beliefs rooted in compassion, the Goldrings' commitment to United Way has not gone unnoticed. Their fifty years of unwavering kindness and generosity has made Toronto a better city—and we thank them for it.



Father and son, Charles Warren and Blake Goldring enjoy each other's company in Woodbine Park.

A tax cut that deserves applause



"I want all Toronto residents to have access to the best medical care, education, and arts and culture this city has to offer—regardless of their ethnic origin or financial capacity."

– Don Johnson

Years of effort by Don and Anna Johnson finally pay off

Don and Anna Johnson are proud to call Toronto home. They also feel it's their responsibility to give back and enrich the city that has given them so much over the years. In their view, United Way has always been the best way to do this. "Giving to United Way is the single best method of giving back to the community," says Anna. "Simply because it touches so many lives."

Don and Anna know they're not alone in their praise of the 50 year-old institution. "United Way is a wonderfully managed organization," says Don. "Our city has great faith in United Way's ability to make the most of its donations."

Back in 1996, Don, too, wanted to make the most of those donations. In fact, he wanted all donors and charities to benefit in a way that our American neighbours had for years. This meant doing away with capital gains tax on charitable gifts of stock—a smart idea that would ultimately prove beneficial to those on both the giving and receiving end.

So with his vision in place, Don initiated a lobbying campaign directed at the federal government, supported by a team of representatives from 4 major areas of charity (health, education, culture and social services). They presented the concept to the Federal House Finance Committee and the mission was underway. In the February 1997 budget, Finance Minister Paul Martin cut the capital gains tax in half for gifts of stock, going half way toward the U.S. system. It would take 10 years to succeed completely, and on May 2, 2006, when Finance Minister Jim Flaherty tabled his budget, Don and his supporters were victorious. The complete exemption of capital gains tax on charitable gifts of stock was a done deal.

With this sweet victory behind him, Don can now focus on his dreams for a better Toronto. Thanks to people like the Johnsons, Toronto is well poised for achieving those dreams.



Don and Anna Johnson take in the pleasures of Front Street East outside the historic Flatiron Building