Homes will be warm thanks to success of Heating Homes with Helping Hands Telethon

PRESQUE ISLE – Thanks to the generosity of the Aroostook County community, United Way of Aroostook, along with Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP) and WAGM-TV, collected hundreds of donations totaling more than $43,000 during their Heating Homes with Helping Hands Telethon on November 2.

"The caring and giving spirit of County people will ensure our most vulnerable friends and neighbors have a resource to turn to helping them stay warm this winter," said ACAP Executive Director/CEO Jason Parent. "The generosity of Aroostook never ceases to amaze me. All of us involved in the telethon are so very grateful to all who made this first-ever Heating Homes with Helping Hands Telethon such a tremendous success!"

Donations came in all forms, ranging from $5 to $1,500, to a donation of a cord of wood from a Madawaska logging and firewood company to a household in need in that community. United Way of Aroostook Executive Director Sherry Locke said the donations truly came in from every community in The County.

“What a day, what an event, and what a community,” said Locke the morning after the telethon. “My office is working like crazy to finalize totals, but pledges are still coming in. An early projection shows that we had over 400 donors help raise over $43,000. Calls, texts, and online donations are still coming in, so that number could rise. Donations are still being accepted online by visiting the WAGM website.”

Response from the news coverage surrounding the event was immediate.

“I already had a voicemail this morning from someone watching the news who said her 80-year-old mother was denied LIHEAP for being over the income guidelines by $7 and she was wondering if she could receive help this way,” said ACAP Case Manager Heidi Rackliffe the morning after the telethon aired.

The phone calls coming in to the ACAP offices inquiring about heating fuel assistance begin early each year – as soon as the temperatures start to drop to uncomfortable levels, which in The County is often in early fall. ACAP administers the federally funded LIHEAP program, providing heating assistance for thousands of Aroostook County residents each season. In some instances, however, such as when waiting for LIHEAP appointments to occur, or when a person fails to
meet all of the necessary qualifications to receive LIHEAP funding, situations arise that may require emergency fuel assistance.

So when WAGM-TV approached ACAP and its community partner United Way of Aroostook about hosting a telethon to support the fund that bridges the gap when needs arise that could force people to make decisions between buying food or medication and staying warm on some of The County’s coldest days, the Heating Homes with Helping Hands Telethon was born. The money raised during the telethon will help heat up to 200 homes this winter.

"Wow, what a day! It’s amazing how generous our neighbors are," said WAGM-TV Station Manager Kelly Landeen. "It is very heartwarming that we can come together to help so many in need, thank you to all of the volunteers and donors that made the Heating Homes with Helping Hands Telethon possible."

Work on the telethon began weeks before it aired on November 2 with logo designs, commercial spots, social media campaigns and news features all designed to raise awareness of the great need for heating fuel assistance in Aroostook County and to build momentum and excitement leading up to the telethon event. On the day of the event, volunteers arrived early to man phones and tally donations. By the time the morning arrived, pre-telethon donations had already been made in response to the awareness efforts leading up to the event, and it took no time at all for the phones to start ringing. WAGM-TV dedicated significant portions of its daily news broadcasts to telethon coverage and throughout the day they did broadcast “cut-ins” while a ticker ran across the bottom of the screen promoting the event and encouraging people to call.

Even before the event, sponsors from Aroostook County’s business community stepped forward to show their support. Gold Sponsors included TAMC, Katahdin Trust and NMCC. Silver Sponsors included Percy’s Auto Sales, United Insurance, Machias Savings Bank, PNM Construction, Northern Maine Medical Center, Aroostook Orthotics and Prosthetics, Tulsa Inc. and Daigle Oil Co. Food for volunteers on the day of the event was donated by ACAP and Graves Shop and Save.

In most cases, Rackliffe says, the funds raised from private sources enable the agency to help avert the crisis the same day the customer comes to ACAP needing assistance, rather than putting them through a lengthy application and wait process. Additionally, ACAP will make every effort to follow-up with those needing emergency heating assistance, once the crisis has passed and fuel has been delivered, to help the family or individual prevent future crises and match them with other, non-emergency assistance programs.

A donation link is available on the WAGM-TV website at http://www.wagmtv.com/heatinghomeshelpinghands.