

Dunham Fund: Gifts could turn \$50,000 into \$250,000

By Marissa Amoni

FOR THE BEACON NEWS

Local leaders shared a common vision when they sat down to a buffet breakfast in the Paramount Theatre's lobby on Monday morning: to provide basic human needs for people in the community.

"This is a time when it is pretty difficult for a lot of people in our community," said Robert Vaughan, executive director of the Dunham Fund.

The Dunham Fund officially announced the establishment of the Dunham Emergency Assistance Fund that could blossom into \$250,000 for local agencies serving individuals and families in need.

"The quarter of a million in funding will provide basic human needs in the community — shelter and food — that all of us need," Vaughan said.

The Dunham Fund Board of Advisers unanimously approved the establishment of the emergency fund this month. The Dunham Fund is a private foundation that started in 2006 after the death of area businessman and philanthropist John C. Dunham.

The emergency fund is being administered by the Fox Valley United Way. Both groups are calling out to community, labor and business leaders to help grow the fund.

Community help needed

"Today ... we can offer some new hope to agencies and those individuals they serve," said Michael Meyer, CEO of Fox Valley United Way.

Meyer mentioned the plight of Hessed House, a homeless service agency in Aurora that could receive assistance from the fund. The largest homeless shelter in the area, Hessed House is at a critical point where it might have to turn people away, he said.

The shelter has 145 beds and 90 chairs, and there have been as many as 80 people sleeping in the chairs recently.

"They are getting people back who were there two or three years ago," Meyer said. "It is taking twice as long to get people transitioned out of the shelter. It is harder to get people out and there are more people wanting to come in. ... It is a

prescription that can't go on for long."

Mayor Tom Weisner acknowledged that he and other community leaders are fortunate to eat three square meals a day — sometimes four, he joked.

"We are able to feed ourselves, feed our families, but life is not going on as it always does. Problems have arisen," Weisner said. "The Fox Valley is no different than the rest of the country."

What makes the difference is how the Fox Valley community responds, he said.

Matching contributions

Anyone can donate to the Fox Valley United Way and the Dunham Fund will match the contribution.

The Dunham Fund presented seed money in the amount of \$50,000 to the Fox Valley United Way at Monday's breakfast. They are challenging United Way to raise \$100,000 for the emergency fund, which the Dunham Fund will match dollar for dollar. Total assistance, to be distributed by the end of the year could be \$250,000 if the challenge grant is met.

Both organizations are reaching out for donations from trade unions and local companies whose members or employees might be affected by the economy.

Local businesses are invited to hold employee fund drives — a \$5 employee donation could turn into \$10, if the employer matches it, and then grow into \$20 after the Dunham Fund doubles the employer donation.

The challenge grant made its first match on Monday after Old Second Bancorp President William Skoglund presented United Way with a check for \$5,000.

Skoglund said the 2-for-1 match appealed to Old Second.

"We're in the community. There is a big need now. (Donating) is something that the community needs to step up and do now," he said.

Call the Fox Valley United Way at 630-896-4636 for information. Contributions to the emergency fund can be made directly to the Fox Valley United Way, 40 W. Downer Place. Online contributions may be made at www.uwfoxvalley.org.

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