

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

United Way passes \$6.94m goal

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The United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton has surpassed its 2009 fundraising goal by \$6,000.

A grassroots push and a last-minute donation from ArcelorMittal Dofasco edged the campaign over its target.

Just hours before the total was announced, it looked as though the agency would fall short of its goal for the first time since its 2004 campaign.

ArcelorMittal came through late in the afternoon with \$100,000. The company donated \$800,000 in total to the 2009 campaign.

The United Way hoped to raise \$6.94 million in Hamilton and Burlington, but the recession, fewer corporate and workplace contributions and donors handing over cash to help with Haiti relief made it a struggle.

The success was announced last night at Carmen's Banquet Centre.

"I feel absolutely incredible," said Hamilton campaign chairperson Anne Bermingham. "I can't believe it; I'm still shaking. It's been such hard work and I just feel so proud of what everyone's done and so grateful to the community."

The organization, which provides funding to 72 area agencies, had set a goal of \$4.86 million in Hamilton and \$2.08 million in Burlington. An extra \$3,000 was raised in each community, although Burlington campaign chairperson Gaston Germain expects there will be more to come once numbers are finalized.

"The communities have been tremendous in their compassion and their concern for really building great communities, not leaving anybody behind -- including people in Haiti," he said.

CEO Len Lifchus said last night that, at 3:30 yesterday afternoon, the campaign still needed \$142,000.

"I was trying to figure out how, for my first campaign, we were going to let the community know that we might have to cut funding to agencies," he said. "We don't have to do that anymore."

Birmingham said ArcelorMittal increased its donation after calling to check how the campaign was doing.

"This is an opportunity for us to just re-emphasize the important work the United Way does and that ArcelorMittal continues to be, as it has for 99 years, a significant supporter of community organizations like the United Way," said Andrew Sloan, general manager of public affairs with the company.

It has also announced \$300,000 to kick-start the 2010 campaign.

Lifchus plans for the agency to go well over the \$7-million mark in the next campaign and thinks that's where they would have been this time without the recession.

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