Community Foundation, Space Coast Health Foundation, and United Way create model partnership in time of coronavirus pandemic; support needed

By Ken Datzman

ROCKLEDGE — Around mid–March, when some of the first coronavirus cases were confirmed in Brevard County, three local nonprofit organizations, seeing strength in numbers, swung into action and partnered.

The Community Foundation for Brevard, Space Coast Health Foundation, and United Way of Brevard — among the most significant nonprofit entities in the region — came together to leverage their knowledge, resources, and strengths to help the community in a time of crisis.

“Of sudden, when the coronavirus became super–real, the three of us came together knowing that this is bigger than any one organization,” said Theresa Grimison, the president and chief executive officer at the Community Foundation for Brevard.

The Community Foundation for Brevard helps nonprofits carry out their important work by awarding grants, forging community partnerships, and educating philanthropists and partners about the organizations that are most aligned with their charitable interests.

“As soon as we all started working remotely on this project, the conversations began,” said Grimison. “It’s been an uplifting experience. The collaboration has been terrific. I think it’s a great thing for our community because we are standing together in a time of crisis. Each organization has an approach to how it does its work in the community, but we have lots of partners in common. And we have different networks we can bring to the table. We are leveraging all of that.”

“I feel like we have become stronger together and we are able to do more, and I am appreciative of that,” added Johnette Gindling, the president and chief executive officer of Space Coast Health Foundation.

“The pandemic is a fluid situation right now. It’s changing. The three organizations are in this for the long haul. We need to make sure we have the resources to help as many people as we can.”

The Space Coast Health Foundation is a grant–making organization established to enhance the health and wellness of individuals and communities in Brevard.

Gindling’s organization operates two programs — the Lifetime Counseling Center and the Children’s Advocacy Center of Brevard.

“One of the things we did right away was to get all our Lifetime counselors on telecounseling so they could continue to provide services to the community,” said Gindling. “That was very important because we not only serve the general population of the community, but also the Brevard County school system.”

Rob Rains, who is in his 26th year as president of United Way of Brevard, has long steered his collaborative organization that works to strengthen communities.

“We have this great respect and history of collaboration, so it was natural to call each other and say ‘let’s work together’ on a joint COVID–19 response,” Rains said. “We are all funders. We have relationships with various agencies. Without this partnership, the many agencies would have to respond to our three different inquiries as we reach out to help them and assess their needs.”

The need is great. For example, over a six–week period last year, starting March 16, the nonprofit helpline 2–1–1 Brevard received 180 calls from people asking about food pantries in the county. This year over the same six–week period, 2–1–1 Brevard answered 906 calls about food pantries.

People asking about food stamps, in the same period, jumped from 62 to 199 requests.

An increasing number of agencies that provide services to people in need are finding it challenging to continue to operate because one of their main sources of funding has been halted — fundraisers and galas.

“At the same time, they are dealing with more requests to help people,” said Rains.

The three organizations established the Brevard COVID–19 Response. They are working with several local partners across sectors to better understand how nonprofits are providing important services to those in need in Brevard.

Their funders will provide additional financial resources to nonprofit agencies and individuals on the Space Coast most impacted by growing economic devastation caused by the virus.

The Response team will receive donations and make emergency grants to nonprofits that have deep roots supporting impacted communities, particularly those that are disproportionately affected by this pandemic and its economic consequences.

“The three organizations all have their own online grant–management system,” said Gindling. “But we made it easier and put together a joint application that we send to the agencies to complete. It’s simple and it gives us the basic information that we need to be able to make funding decisions.”

The Community Foundation for Brevard, Space Coast Health Foundation, and United Way of Brevard will match up to $50,000 each, totaling $150,000 between the three funders, and they’re seeking private donations, too. For every dollar donated, two dollars will go to relief efforts.

United Way of Brevard’s emergency funding kicked off the project.

Recently, the three organizations hosted a Zoom meeting for the agencies. “We had close to 50 agencies on the call,” said Gindling. “They told us where they see
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their greatest needs for their respective organizations.”

She continued, “It was amazing because they were reaching out to help each other solve problems during the call. Some said they had masks available, some had disinfectant, some had gloves. They wanted to get their supplies where they were needed in the county. It just made me feel proud to be living in this community, to see the way people come together to help each other.”

The following areas of need are a focus of the Brevard COVID–19 Response:

FOOD SUPPORT. Access to food will be critical with school closings and the closure of senior lunch sites. “Many people who are out of work, especially those in the service sector, are struggling to put food on the table,” said Rains. “That is a great concern. There is a big financial need for helping the frontline, non-profit agencies that are stepping up and responding to the crisis, such as Aging Matters’ agencies that are stepping up and responding to the crisis, such as Aging Matters’

The Children’s Hunger Project is providing more than 5,800 meals weekly to young people ages 18 and under at Brevard Public Schools’ distribution sites. It also provides meals to Students in Transition, Club Esteem, the Boys and Girls Clubs, and is helping other organizations, too. The Children’s Hunger Project’s budget has gone from $9,200 weekly to more than $23,000 weekly.

“The Community Foundation for Brevard is really appreciative because Rob (Rains) stepped in and said ‘individual funding’ is important. But it’s something we do not do. So what a wonderful thing our partnership is for our community,” said Grimison.

“Right out of the gate our focus was on food security and other basic needs. During the first few weeks, we reached out to longtime partners of the Community Foundation for Brevard to make sure they had resources that could be quickly deployed in the community,” she said. • EMERGENCY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE. This focus is on families and individuals struggling with basic needs because of job loss.

• FRONT-LINE, NONPROFIT AGENCIES. Funds will provide additional resources to those organizations that need to adapt their programs and services in this environment. The focus will be on working with Brevard’s most vulnerable residents needing assistance.

“The nonprofit sector is critically important to our community’s health and vitality,” said Grimison. “Nonprofits are essential to our social good. They have more than one bottom line, and they have to run like a business. And without fundraising events or activities where people gather, we are deeply concerned about that loss of revenue for nonprofits. We are encouraging people to continue to support the organizations they are committed to, because they need your help now more than ever.”

As of early May, a little over $150,000 has been granted or committed to a host of organizations through existing funds at the Community Foundation for Brevard or the Brevard Relief Fund.

The agencies include Aging Matters in Brevard, Brevard Homeless Coalition, Children’s Hunger Project, Club Esteem, The Daily Bread, Evans Center, Neighbor-Up Brevard, Family Promise of Brevard, North Brevard Charities Sharing Center, Sharing Center of Central Brevard, South Brevard Sharing Center, St. Vincent de Paul Society, and Love INC.

Additional grants have been made to a number of organizations through specific “Fields of Interest Funds” related to animal welfare and conservation initiatives in the community. They include: Brevard Humane Society, Brevard Zoo, Florida Wildlife Hospital, SPCA of Brevard, and Walk on Water Equine Assisted Therapy.

United Way of Brevard has currently committed about $140,000 and has raised $300,000. “Corporations have stepped up and individuals have stepped up to help. The generosity in this community is impressive,” said Rains.

To donate, visit these sites:

• Community Foundation for Brevard at www.CFBrevard.org or give to the Brevard Relief Fund–COVID–19.

• Space Coast Health Foundation at www.SCHFBrevard.org.

• United Way of Brevard at www.UWBrevard.org to give to Brevard’s COVID–19 Response Fund.

For additional COVID–19 community resources, visit United Way of Brevard’s website.

Separately, United Way of Brevard has produced a COVID–19 “Community Resource Guide.” The information is updated “a couple of times each day,” said Rains. “It’s a very comprehensive guide, providing information on food stamps, food pantries and feeding sites, unemployment, and much more. We’re proud of the work we did putting that guide together.”

“It’s going to take all of us working together to get through this difficult time,” said Grimison. “While the challenges are growing day–to–day, the generosity of our fund holders and community members, coupled with the capacity of our critical service providers, will help us weather this crisis and emerge even stronger in Brevard.”

“Stronger together,” added Rains.