

# NEWS RELEASE

**United Way of  
Jackson County**  
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## **JUDGE WEBB INSPIRES JACKSON COUNTY CROWD**

*Nationally Renowned Speaker Encourages Positive Action;  
United Way Shares Video, Progress on Poverty Initiatives*

JACKSON, Michigan (March 29, 2017) – Caring for others and for community has the power to making a lasting difference. That’s the message Judge Tommy Webb delivered to 170 attendees at the 81st annual meeting of United Way of Jackson County.

In line with that theme, UWJC gave an update on its financial stability focus, which the organization unveiled last year. The update included a new, locally produced video featuring testimonials from people struggling in poverty.

A nationally acclaimed speaker, Webb was an orphan in 1950s post-war Korea, struggling to survive on the streets, when he was adopted by an American family and learned the value of education, compassion and respect. Webb went on to serve with the U.S. Marines, as a pastor, and as the first Asian judge on the bench in Kansas. Today he is a frequent speaker on child abuse and neglect and the power of individuals to make a difference.

“The person I am is because of the choices I made. But I also understand if there had not been certain people who reached out with compassion and care along that journey, I would not be alive today,” said Webb, encouraging the crowd to extend that same compassion to the community.

Webb’s childhood experience with abject poverty is not so different from what some Jackson County residents face today, said Ken Toll, President and CEO of UWJC.

“The impact of poverty is far-reaching, affecting every other area that United Way works in: education, health and basic supports,” Toll explained. “We’re committed to strengthening

our focus on financial stability. Every program we support, every partnership we engage in, must demonstrate a clear path toward reducing poverty for individuals and families.”

United Way announced its focus on financial stability a year ago. Since then, Toll said, the organization has made progress:

- A Financial Stability Network representing nonprofit agencies and other organizations eager to tackle poverty has been formed. The network is fashioned much like Cradle 2 Career and the Health Improvement Organization—groups of people and agencies with unique strengths, pooling their expertise and resources toward a common goal.
- UWJC established a collective vision for Jackson County: “A community rich in opportunities to eliminate poverty and allow all people to achieve financial stability and success.”
- UWJC also set a bold goal to measure its progress: Helping 5,000 Jackson County residents develop a pathway to financial success by 2025. “That means having the programs, tools and training available to every person who is able and ready to leave poverty behind and become financially stable,” Toll said.

According to Toll, community volunteers are now reviewing financial stability program proposals totaling \$1.9 million. “That demonstrates both the challenge and the potential for our community to come together to tackle poverty,” said Toll.

As part of educating attendees on the impact of poverty, United Way premiered a new video titled “Dear Jackson: Letters From Poverty.” The video features local residents reading testimonials from people struggling financially. The video can be seen on UWJC’s homepage, [www.uwjackson.org](http://www.uwjackson.org).

Also at the annual meeting:

- UWJC announced the results of its 2016 annual campaign. Local donors raised \$1,930,575 to support programs and partnerships through United Way.
- The 2017 campaign cabinet will be led by Chad Rumsey and Brian Van Blarcum.
- The Women’s Leadership Council announced that it is rebranding as Women United. Melissa Callison, Consumers Energy, ended her tenure as founding chair, turning over leadership to Tara Greene, Flagstar Bank; and Catina Lowe,

RidgeCrest Health. Andrea Adams will lead Power of the Purse, the group's annual fundraiser. Also, Callison received the organization's Champion Award for her service.

- Energizing Education, the reading and family engagement program in seven Jackson County schools, received \$23,000 from last fall's Power Of The Purse.
- The UWJC Board of Directors added new members Mark Allen, John Ferguson, Tony Lewis and Ted Ykimoff. Outgoing members Mindy Bradish-Orta, Janice Fairley, Henry Grayson, Cheryl Norey and Kevin Oxley were honored for their service.
- UWJC kicked off a new online fundraising effort to support Energizing Education. The goal is \$300,000. Industrial Steel Treating, including the Levy family owners, and Dawn Foods Foundation are leading the effort. The campaign uses a unique online tool called Giving Grid in which donors can select an amount and upload a photo to show their commitment. Find out more at [www.givinggrid.com/eejackson](http://www.givinggrid.com/eejackson).

### **About United Way of Jackson County**

United Way of Jackson County mobilizes people, organizations and funds to create a community rich in opportunities to eliminate poverty and allow all people to achieve financial stability and success. We are committed to helping 5,000 Jackson County residents develop a pathway to financial success by 2025. Visit our website at [www.uwjackson.org](http://www.uwjackson.org), or follow us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

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