



## "That's What Community is All About"

Paul DeBarthe comes from a family of educators. He's a seventh-generation teacher who loves to stimulate young people's minds. During his 40 years as a social studies teacher, Paul has taught his students the crucial role social service agencies play in fighting things like homelessness, hunger, mental illness, and juvenile delinquency. From an educational perspective, he "got it" and he wanted to make sure his students did too.

Paul spent 37 years teaching in Shawnee Mission High Schools, where poverty was something most students read about or discussed in class and not something they dealt with everyday. Nevertheless, Paul wanted them to understand the importance of having a strong social service safety net, and how nonprofit agencies work together to strengthen a community. In January 2000, through his own personal experience, Paul discovered the truthfulness of what he'd been teaching his students for years.

One night, as he was working a second job to earn money for his kids' college tuition, Paul received a frantic call from his daughter saying their house was on fire. By the time firefighters arrived, the house was destroyed. They lost almost everything. About all they had left was the clothing on their backs. Through an unfortunate set of circumstances, the family hadn't mailed in their insurance premium on time so the insurance company refused to pay, saying the policy wasn't in force at the time of the fire.

Paul and his family received immediate assistance from the American Red Cross, a United Way-funded agency, but they needed more help than the Red Cross could provide. A friend suggested they call United Way's Information and Referral line (now United Way 2-1-1). "We needed guidance on where to go and what to do. We had grown children in the community so we temporarily moved in with them, but their upper floor was bare so United Way tied us into several different agencies that gave us clothing, food, mattresses, bedding and towels. There were at least four agencies that helped us."

Paul's students, former students and their parents also got involved, holding special fundraisers to help his family. Paul has never forgotten the compassion and generosity of those who came to his aid. Paul says, "The combination of help we received from United Way agencies and from my students was a remarkable commentary to me about the benefits of living in a caring community."

Ten years after the fire, Paul has retired from teaching in the Shawnee Mission Schools and is teaching in the Kansas City, Missouri School District. Paul says he continues teaching because he wants to help young people succeed in life, "It feels a little bit like a call to destiny." Now, class discussions about the impact of poverty and the role social service agencies play in helping low-income families are no longer theoretical. He sees it every day.

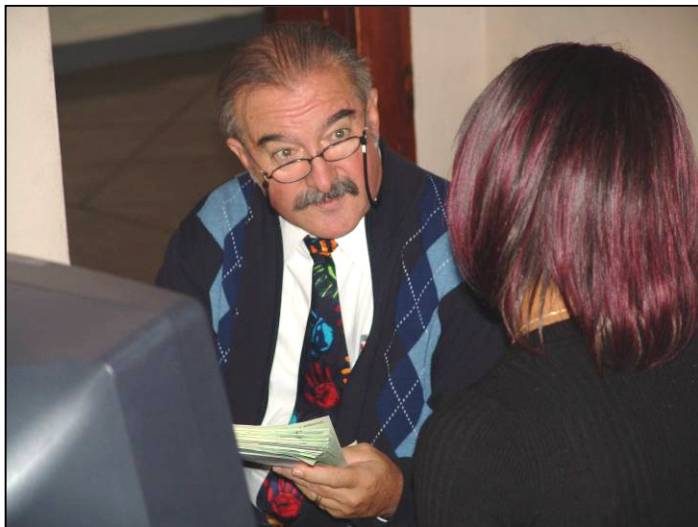
When asked to make a pledge during last fall's United Way campaign, Paul gladly agreed, pledging more than 2% of his salary, making him a Leadership Giver. Why so much? Because he sees how United Way-funded programs are helping his students and Paul hasn't forgotten how they came to the rescue of his family. "I saw how the network of agencies works together so remarkably to help people in a disaster. It pulled us back from the brink and helped us realize the worst was over. We were treated as significant people who needed help and help was forthcoming. This is our opportunity to make sure help is available for some other family."

Paul says, "My parents wanted their sons to be pillars of the community. Now I'm of the age where I can appreciate what they were saying. Pillars of the community have to shoulder their share of responsibility, so I'm stepping forward to do so. As I've been telling my students for many years, that's what being part of a community is all about."



After 41 years in the classroom, Westport High School teacher Paul DeBarthe still loves challenging his students to think and open their minds. Today's lesson focused on world hunger and what we can do, to battle hunger in our community.

Mr. DeBarthe said he learned the importance of having a strong network of social service agencies when his family lost everything in a house fire 10 years ago. He told his students how four United Way agencies helped his family during their hour of need.



Paul DeBarthe believes that listening to students is an important part of teaching.

He encourages his students to ask questions because he says, "that is that is the best way for them to learn."



Although he doesn't make a lot of money as a teacher, Paul DeBarthe says helping students learn and succeed in life is his own reward.

This year, Mr. DeBarthe became a United Way Leadership donor saying, "I see the positive impact United Way is having in our community and I want to do my part to help."