



CARLOS ORTIZ staff photographer

Rochester residents Rachel Staver, left, and Terra Keller help volunteers sort out bags of food for the backpack program for kids at Foodlink during the Day of Caring in Rochester Thursday.

9,000 local volunteers lend time, talents in Day of Caring

ERNST LAMOTHE JR.
 STAFF WRITER

A 1-year-old girl with a side-ways pony tail sat on an adult's lap at the Monroe Community College Child Care Center. She kept looking around the room while volunteers from the Association for the Blind and Visual Impaired Goodwill and Bausch + Lomb tried to get her to stare into a machine to examine her pupils.

The girl is participating in a first-time program helping to prevent and identify eye-related problems for kids ages 6 months to 5 years old. The pro-

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Click on this story for a video on about the United Way Day of Caring in the Rochester area.

gram was one of 500 volunteer projects for the annual United Way Day of Caring on Thursday, Rochester's single largest volunteer event.

This year 9,000 volunteers lent their time, talents and energy to aid local not-for-profit organizations. Some of the

projects included stuffing backpacks at Foodlink with essential supplies for children, taking senior citizens out on excursions and various clean-up projects throughout the community.

"We get easily entrenched with our daily lives of going to work and home. We sometimes forget there is an outside world away from ourselves," said Elizabeth Harness Murphy, who volunteered Thursday from Bausch + Lomb. "Life can be pretty boring if you

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only concentrate on yourself.”

The little girl's exam indicated that her right eye turns inward toward her nose when she looks straight ahead, a possible early sign of lazy eye. If left untreated, it could lead to more serious eye ailments.

These vision screenings reflected the United Way of Greater Rochester's new focus on prevention and early intervention for early childhood, school-age youth, aging, crisis services and disability services.

The United Way this year has increased out-

reach to smaller businesses and improved its social networking.

It also factored in the challenging economy and international disaster relief efforts when it kicked off its \$28 million campaign.

“Charities always lag a year to a year and a half after any economic troubles,” said Peter Carpino, president of United Way. “And the economic downturn forced us to change the way we do things, doing more with limited resources.”

At a networking event this year Josh Bouk, of Greece, a technology professional, met up with Carpino and they talked about the need for additional city school technology programs, especially

in economically depressed areas.

Bouk, who is also president of local technology organization Digital Rochester, wanted to be part of the solution.

“United Way has had some challenges in the past connecting with small businesses, which make up a larger number in the community,” said Bouk, whose organization has raised more than \$5,000 for United Way. “Smaller businesses are also looking at ways to give back to the Rochester area in the same way that larger employers have been doing.”

Colleen Wegman, 2010 United Way campaign chair, said the organization is trying new methods to re-energize its

base, recruit younger volunteers and reach out to small and mid-sized businesses.

The United Way quadrupled its goal of volunteerism, from 250,000 hours last year to 1 million this year. Reaching the volunteer goals would be the equivalent of contributing more than \$7 million back to the community.

“We have to reach out to people who are now retired who previously chose to support us when they were working, as well as reach the youth who might not know what United Way has to offer,” said Wegman. “Younger people want to know they are making a difference with their time instead of with a check.” □

ELAMOTHE@DemocratandChronicle.com