

United Way's 29th Day of Caring back at full force in city, Central Mass. as pandemic wanes

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WORCESTER — The United Way of Central Massachusetts celebrated a massive turnout Friday for its 29th annual Day of Caring, with more than 900 volunteers working on 64 various projects across the region.

“These really are the numbers we used to see for Day of Caring before the pandemic,” said Emily McCann, vice president of community engagement at United Way of Central Massachusetts.

This year, United Way provided volunteers for all 33 agencies that submitted projects, she said. McCann credited the outpouring of support demonstrated by local employers, schools and other community groups eager to get back to in-person service as the pandemic wanes.

Continuous project submissions from both new and recurring agency partners meant there was no shortage of work for the volunteers, and United Way was able to accept “more projects from partners who really needed the support,” McCann said.

“As much as I love the term ‘sweat equity,’ my own derivation is when people get involved on this scale, they’re giving ‘sweat humanity,’ ” Tim Garvin, president and CEO of United Way of Central Massachusetts, said. “Today is about putting humanity into action.”

Part of the reason for this influx comes from Worcester being a college town, McCann said, with schools such as Holy Cross, Assumption and Quinsigamond Community College, whose students could not participate during the pandemic.

This is not to say that colleges provided the majority of volunteers. The morning shift on the Worcester Housing Authority project at Great Brook Valley had over 100 volunteers from National Grid, Saint-Gobain and Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Worcester class painting handrails, playgrounds and basketball court.

Other projects included cleanups at the Boys & Girls Club of Worcester by groups from Webster Five, Country Bank and Community Legal Aid; and Jeremiah's Inn by eighth-graders from the Nativity School of Worcester.

"People haven't been able to help in the way they could before," McCann said, "and seeing people struggle through the pandemic, they felt compelled to make a difference."