

Gloria's United Way Remarks

Thank you very much.

There are many groups and individuals who have helped bring me to this moment. They include my own family and the families at People's Emergency Center; my staff, volunteers, Board and funders. They also include, of course, my colleagues here at the United Way, led so ably by Chris James Brown and David L. Cohen. I'll resist the temptation to recite all their names, but I do thank them all.

Probably the most important thing I want to convey to you today is this – for all the pressures and unknowns, the constant striving for organizational growth and improvement, the tight deadlines, the late-night reading and the early-morning meetings – my efforts at PEC and the United Way have also come with a sense of luxury. My work at both organizations lets me act according to my heart and my passions. So few people get to do that.

As many of you know, I am a product of the 60's and the 70's. I have long been “accused” of being an activist – and I take that accusation as a point of pride. For example, when people ask me what it take to end homelessness, I often say “nothing short of a revolution.” (Some people take that as reason enough not to fight homelessness at all.) But who would have guessed that right here, at the United Way, I would be part of fomenting a genuine revolution? – a revolution in what the United Way is and does.

Long a respected fundraiser and fundgiver in the region, the United Way has become a new kind of organization. Through a superbly well-organized and inclusive process, we worked from vision to mission to measurable goals, to a powerful – and yes, controversial – advertising campaign, and to a whole new way to distribute funds. We looked at regional needs and considered how United Way funds could have the greatest impact in improving the lives and prospects of our most vulnerable citizens. What emerged is a partnership – donors, volunteers, staff, leadership and board – committed to positive change.

Yes, it's been a lot of work, but those of us who want to generate lasting, systemic change and to foster social justice know that a revolution takes a lot of work.

I can't imagine an organization through which a volunteer could expect to have a greater impact on the broadest possible range of social, civic, and health issues than the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania. To all of you with whom I've had the pleasure of working, and to those who have singled me out for this recognition, I say thank you.