

United Way bridges 905, 416

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Records are made to be broken, broken people can be mended, challenges can be met and the divide between the GTA's 416 communities and our 905 neighbourhoods will be bridged.

Delivering inspiration to the 33rd annual general meeting of United Way of York Region in Vaughan was the organization's chief executive, Daniele Zanotti, and Toronto Board of Trade president Carol Wilding.

Attended by new and re-elected board members and directors, business and community leaders and representatives from many of the 39 funded York Region social services agencies, the LeParc conference centre gathering was first updated on United Way's milestone 2008-09 fundraising campaign.

More than \$5.4 million was invested in York's social support network, delivering 100 programs through our nine municipalities. Another \$2.1 million was donor-directed to other charities and \$423,000 was devoted to community leadership programs that train volunteers.

Ms Wilding, an Aurora resident and head of Canada's largest board of trade, allied her 164-year-old organization with York's younger United Way.

"It's true that my organization is rooted in Old Toronto," she told the audience. "But while we have a long tradition within the city of Toronto, the perspective we hold and the work we do, does not stop at Steeles Avenue.

"Our primary focus is the health of the economy. And when it comes to the economy, we don't put much stock in

municipal borders."

Citing the board's recently published Toronto as a Global City: Scorecard on Prosperity, a review of 21 international urban centres based on 25 statistical indicators, Toronto tied for fourth behind Calgary, Dallas and Hong Kong.

The Toronto study included surrounding regions, including York, she said. The findings are of interest to social service providers in both areas.

The city centre's strength lay in the domain called labour attractiveness, Ms Wilding said. "Compared to the surrounding region the city centre's population is younger, it is more diverse, more of its residents hold at least a bachelor's degree and it employs more people in the cultural industries."

"Mind you, the outlying region had its strengths in this area as well. Its homicide rate is lower, housing is more affordable and it had fewer people living in poverty."

Specifically, in the (Toronto) city centre, 24 per cent of residents were at or below the low income cut off. In the surrounding regions, the figure was 16 per cent.

"I think you'll agree when I say both those figures are simply too high," she said. "There was a time when people might have said that poverty was exclusively an inner-city problem. That's not the case anymore."

"The numbers only underscore the importance of the work done here by the entire team at the United Way of York Region. We all need to be vigilant to ensure that poverty does not become generational."

Toronto and its neighbours must learn from each other, she said.