

United Way announces \$498K award

Bergen County's United Way recently announced the awarding of \$498,227 in federal funds under the National Emergency Food and Shelter Program. The United Way administers the program locally on behalf of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The federal appropriation is based on a "misery index," a measure of the unemployment and poverty rates.

With Bergen County food stamp rolls up 14 percent; New Jersey's jobless rate hitting 7.1 percent, its highest level in 15 years; and the loss of 63,000 jobs in 2008 (with 34,800 in the final two months of the year), the increase of \$95,000 in FEMA funds is a welcome relief.

The Emergency Food and Shelter Program Funding (EFSP) helps support social services agencies serving poor and homeless individuals and families.

According to the most recent Point in Time survey of the homeless, almost half of Bergen County's homeless are children. "Our community has been hard hit," said Tom Toronto, president of Bergen County's United Way. "More and

more people are struggling to survive. While the grants we award provide an added boost to the outstanding work done by local non-profit agencies, we must do more to help our neighbors who are hurting."

The funds are used for mass shelter and feeding, food distribution through food banks and pantries, utility payments to prevent service disconnection, and rent or mortgage assistance to prevent evictions or help people leaving shelters to establish stable living conditions.

Grant recipients include Bergen County Community Action Partnership (\$29,682), Bergen County's United Way Compassion Fund (\$74,000), Catholic Charities (\$32,245), the Center for Food Action (\$173,350), Christ Church Community Development Corporation (\$117,750), the Inter-Religious Fellowship for the Homeless (\$21,500), Jewish Family Services (\$11,500), the Salvation Army (\$4,000), Shelter Our Sisters (\$17,200) and the Social Services Association of Ridgewood and Vicinity (\$17,000).

