

The Daily Herald.

Luncheon includes laughs, lauds

Speaker cuts up for United Way

By GREG MENZA/ gmenza@c-dh.net

An appreciative audience of United Way supporters were encouraged and entertained by award-winning journalist Mary Katharine Ham Wednesday at the United Way of Maury County's Campaign 2010 Luncheon.



Ham, a staff writer for the conservative political magazine *The Weekly Standard*, was the keynote speaker for this year's fundraising campaign. Amid her praise for the work of the United Way, Ham poked fun at herself, her boyfriend and political commentator Bill O'Reilly, whose FOX-TV show she frequently appears on.

Dave Grech, of Hampshire, chats with journalist Mary Katharine Ham following the Campaign 2010 United Way Luncheon held Wednesday. Staff photo by Greg Menza



United Way Board member Tom Brewer, Jake Brewer, Mary Katharine Ham and United Way of Maury County Executive Director Kay Hamilton greet guests prior to the Campaign 2010 Luncheon held Wednesday at the Memorial Building. Staff photo by Greg Menza

"It's great to be here to talk about the United Way — it's a much better use of my time than talking politics — and Bill talks so much I can barely get a word in anyway," Ham said.

Ham is currently dating 1999 Columbia Central High School graduate Jake Brewer with whom she recently attended Central's 10-Year Reunion. Both live in Washington, D.C.

"The weather is so nice here, I know Jake would rather be here on a lawn mower cutting grass than back in Washington today. If anybody needs their lawn cut, he's not doing anything after this," she joked.

Ham also had her audience laughing as she recounted her experience, or lack thereof, as a Girl Scout.

"I washed out as a Girl Scout — never got beyond a 'Daisy' — I just couldn't sell the tag-a-longs," she said.

Back on point, Ham praised the Maury County community for its continued support of the United Way and its willingness to help the less fortunate.

"I'm excited to be in a great town like Columbia where people are blessed to be able to support the United Way and actually see their gifts help those in need right here in your own community," she said.

One of those in attendance who has been a recipient of those gifts is Dave Grech of Hampshire. Grech suffers from debilitating arthritis and diabetes. The diseases and their complications have rendered him unable to work. He credits United Way of Maury County's support of the local YMCA with helping to improve his quality of life.

"I'm sure I would not have lived this long or be able to maintain my mobility if not for the rehabilitation and exercise programs at the YMCA. It's only because the United Way helps underwrite the cost of these programs for people like me that I'm able to take advantage of them," Grech said.

United Way of Maury County Executive Director Kay Hamilton said the organization's support of programs like the YMCA and its other partner agencies can be life changing.

The United Way movement creates long lasting changes by addressing the underlying causes of problems that prevent progress in the area," she said.

The United Way of Maury County helps support more than 30 local partner agencies involved in providing aid and support to Maury County Families. Begun in 1955 as the Community Chest, a fundraising effort to help seven needy students and seven local non-profit agencies the organization became known as the United Givers Fund three years later. It operated under that name until 1989 when the organization affiliated with the national United Way.

Since its inception, the organization has distributed more than \$12 million to member agencies that help families displaced by disasters, provide medical care to those unable to afford it, serve as advocates for abused or neglected children and victims of domestic abuse and offer many more services to better the Maury County community.

More information about how to get involved with the United Way of Maury County can be obtained by calling (931) 381-0100 or at www.uwmc.us.