



P-T photo | Denise Massie

**ON THE JOB:** Ron Barr works on bundling transmission rings for Matthew Warren. Barr is a participant of the Work Services Program at Peak Community Services which receives United Way funding.

**United Way**



**LIVING UNITED**

Changing lives in Cass County

## Providing assistance

■ Peak Community Services has been assisting others since 1954.

**BY DENISE MASSIE**  
PHAROS-TRIBUNE

It all started one day in 1954, when three women were sitting around a kitchen table talking.

"They were looking for services for their children, who couldn't go to school," said Kathi Thompson, director of development and communications. "As their children grew up, they needed assistance with work skills and than living on their own, after the parents passed."

Since that day, Peak Community Services has grown and expanded its operations. The organization operates four group homes in Cass County and its main facility on Woodlawn Avenue.

Don Weikel, executive director at Peak Community Services, said the organization reaches out to more than just the five locations.

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In fact, with all the people working outside of the main location, Weikel said the organization probably reaches 60 businesses and organizations outside of its own.

Peak's main role in the community is to assist those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The organization provides work programs, which help find job placement not only in its own workshop, but at other businesses throughout Cass County. It also offers residential programs, which include a group home or apartment living.

The family services aspect provides support by sending someone from the organization into a family's home. Under this category, Peak Community provides support to children and young adults. Skilled programs are another part of the organization.

In addition, day services are

offered for people with multiple disabilities, who are usually living in a nursing home or use a wheelchair.

During an average year, Peak Community Services assists close to 200 people.

Thompson added the actual number of those needing assistance in Cass County is unknown, however, since the state of Indiana maintains the list. Close to two years ago, the number of people on the waiting list for Cass County was 200.

The state list has added more than 4,000 names to its list in the last two years, which has grown to 19,948 names. Therefore, Thompson said it seems safe to assume the list in Cass County has also grown significantly as well.

That's where the United Way funding comes into play. The organization is one of 10 member agencies receiving support from the United Way of Cass County. The United Way is now in the midst of its annual pledge drive at work places

throughout the county. Its goal for this year is \$510,000.

"The United Way dollars serve those people on the waiting list," Thompson said. "These people have been on the waiting list and could be for 10 years."

Thompson pointed out that those who signed up for the waiting list on Nov. 7, 1998, are now just making it to the top of the state list.

Peak Community Services actually decided to use the funding to help those on the waiting list in 2005.

"The money goes specifically to the workshop services," Thompson explained.

During one week, anywhere from three to six people work in the Peak Community Service Workshop. Those employed at the workshop work anywhere from one to three days a week.

The Work Services Program offers light industrial assembly and packaging services, while also offering a training environment to adults with devel-

opmental disabilities. Some of those employed in the program use it as a transition to working in the community.

As soon as the person goes to the top of the state list, they are eligible to transfer to state paid services. This allows someone else locally to receive the United Way-funded service.

According to Weikel, one of the most unique parts of the organization is it was created locally, is ran locally and is supported by the local United Way.

"The local base has been our strength," he said.

Weikel and Thompson said if Peak Community Services didn't receive funding from United Way, it wouldn't just take a toll on the organization.

"It's not where we would be," Thompson said. "It would be about where the people on the waiting list would be."

"They would be sitting at home," Weikel added.

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