

2024 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE WEBSTER COMMUNITY CHEST

Seventy-seven years ago, in 1948 when the Webster Community Chest was founded, hundreds of communities in New York also had their own Community Chests. It was a national movement. The Chest in some larger cities, such as Rochester, were converted to United Way agencies, but most have failed over time. The Sullivan United Community Chest dissolved in 2022, leaving only us and nine others still operating. None of the others offer the breadth of services to their community and to those in need that your Webster Community Chest does. Our work in Webster is recognized. In December, the Webster Chamber of Commerce honored us as their "Business of the Month", noting the impact we have in this community. It gives me pleasure to now report our 2024 successes.

The Chest relies upon the donations of the citizens and businesses of the greater Webster community for its operations. The majority of donations come from individuals. Grants and donations from local foundations, trusts, and churches are our next largest source of funds. Local organizations sponsor several fundraising events during the year. We thank the Lions for their Breakfast with Santa, Webster Schroeder art teachers and students for their two Empty Bowl projects, the United Church of Christ for their annual Caring Concert, and Webster Masons for the Spaghetti Dinner. We also get donations from businesses, clubs, and other groups in the community. Note that we have never taken money from any government for our operating expenses.

We are inspired by all of you who support the work of the Chest. We do all we can to ensure that you get the greatest possible value for your donations. Our administration is entirely volunteer, we have no facilities, and overhead expenses are incurred only when unavoidable, so almost all our funds go directly into meeting the needs of local residents.

This past year 601 families and individuals contacted us for assistance. Our Benefits Counselors, Tracy Dennis and Kris Lombardo, partnering with over 90 other agencies successfully match the needs to these other resources most of the time, saving our donors' money for needs that cannot be met any other way.

When there is no immediate recourse or other help in a crisis or emergency, we provide direct aid. Our funds—your donations—were used to prevent 25 needy and deserving Webster families from losing their homes and assets, with another 5 other aid payments preventing utility shut-off, providing auto repairs, and assisting in moves. We provide our services on behalf of our donors to residents in Webster and northern third of Penfield in the 14580 ZIP Code area. Most clients are single parents, disabled, or elderly. If you know of someone who might need assistance, please have them reach out to us by phone at (585) 671-2060 or by e-mail at webcommchest@gmail.com. Any resident who is in need may contact us.

Our Meal Center operation continues to expand. In our first year in 2022, we provided over 3,000 ready-to-prepare meals to needy families. In 2023, over 7,000 meals went out. This past year we were up to an astonishing 11,146 meals distributed to food-insecure families out of our facility in the Immanuel Lutheran Church in the village. The distributions are usually made at the last Thursday each month just as SNAP benefits (formerly "food stamps") run out for many families. Many groups and organizations have held food drives to help with this.

In conjunction with the Meal Center, our Benefits Counselors and volunteers organized a Coat Closet to provide coats, hats, mittens, and more to needy families, oftentimes refugees who arrived here with almost nothing. They also led in establishing a partnership with Hope House and with the Gathering Place to jointly provide holiday meals for 126 low-income families in the Spring, 88 for the 4th of July, and 181 for Thanksgiving. Our share for the end-of-year holidays was 10 families with 23 children who received food, gifts, and gift cards.

We subsidize Meals on Wheels for elderly and disabled residents who are on the waiting list and would otherwise not get meals. In all other local communities, these folks would not get meals until government approval is given, which can take months. Only in Webster do they get wellness visits and meals right away

thanks to your donations. We subsidized 866 of these meals in 2024 up from 221 meals in 2023. The average client is served while on the wait list for nearly nine weeks.

Your donations also sent low-income children to a week in summer camp and provided funds to several local organizations with programs to benefit residents. We also continued to aid low-income families that have children with disabilities. In partnership with a local foundation, we have made it affordable for our clients to put their children in developmental therapy programs with Heritage Christian Stables and Gliding Stars. We also provide scholarship money to the Special Education Parent and Teacher Association.

Our annual Shirley Miller Award is given to local graduating high school seniors to recognize exemplary efforts as young volunteers and to encourage community service in their schoolmates. We awarded eight unrestricted scholarships to Webster residents this year at three high schools. Thomas HS—Sophia May, Eliza Drum, Kenyon Later, Martina Broiou; Schroeder HS—Mason Drew, Carly Mason, Erin Mueller; McQuaid HS—Alex Steele.

Some of our funds are used to help other non-profit groups in Webster under our Aid to Organizations program. This was a core program for Community Chests since the movement began. Some of the remaining Chests only do this. The food cupboard at Willink Middle School wanted to provide "break boxes" in December to 15 families for whom the 2 week break would be especially hard, as they depend on free breakfast and lunch for their children. They ran into a packaging problem, but the Chest responded by buying 15 Large Insulated Reusable Grocery Bags for them. These sturdy bags will be used again and again now. Heritage Christian Services Respitewood offers short-term support to children and adults in a home setting. We provided a grant to provide two iPads, a new TV, and games and craft supplies, which benefited about 120 people staying there, including 40 kids. Girls on the Run Rochester offers programs designed to inspire girls of all abilities to recognize and embrace their inner strength and make meaningful connections with others. Trained coaches use physical activity and dynamic discussions to build social, emotional and physical skills while encouraging healthy habits for life. We have supported this program in the past and this year we covered the fees for four girls from low-income families in Webster. Camp Joy at Rotary Sunshine Camp is another program for developmentally disabled adults. We helped send several Webster residents to that. At Hope House, we sponsored three community garden boxes used to raise fresh food for the food cupboard there. In all of the schools our "Underwear Project" has taken on an expense that used to be out-of-pocket for nurses and teachers by keeping a stock of clothes at each school to use when young students have had accidents that soiled their clothes.

I am very pleased with several new ventures begun this year. First, a qualified instructor organized a Strategic Planning Committee with a number of Chest volunteers to consider how we should operate in the future and particularly to identify services not currently available that the Chest could provide. Donors, Clients, and volunteers were all surveyed during the process and we were very pleased with the final results. You'll see more on this next year as we develop these recommended programs. It was brought to our attention that of the six "Little Pantries" in Webster only one had no sponsor and was usually empty. Our volunteers led the adoption, refurbished the box at Phillips Village, and have kept it stocked with needed foodstuffs ever since.

It is the people of our community who make this such a wonderful place to live! I would like to recognize the members of our Board of Directors and our officers who have all volunteered their time and skills to oversee the operations of the Chest. Anyone who is looking to serve our community as a volunteer should consider joining this dedicated group. Many other residents have been generous in donating their time to assist in the delivery of services and to help raise funds. If you want to help now, go to <https://webcommchest.org/> to learn more about us and to donate.

Respectfully submitted,
Michael Grenier, President, Webster Community Chest