

Cummings aims to increase skimpy United Way donations

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

We give to our United Way in York Region less than half what is given to other United Ways in Ontario.

Think that doesn't matter?

This is a region where the emergency shelters are overcrowded, and 130 people wait for help at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

A place where 90 women who want to be Big Sisters for girls who need them are forced to be patient, and where 5,000 families are on a list for affordable housing.

But Doug Cummings is determined to make a dent in our charitable deficit.

At noon next Saturday, the United Way of York Region will release its 2002 campaign goal in style, at Buttonville Airport on 16th Avenue east of Hwy. 404 in Markham.

A vice-president of BCE Emergis in Thornhill, Mr. Cummings, 44, is campaign chairperson for a charity umbrella that delivers 124 programs through 37 agencies.

The United Way assists one in every three York Region residents, but growth and the needs of a diverse community are saddling its social agencies with long waiting lists.



DOUG CUMMINGS: This year's York Region United Way campaign kicks off at Buttonville Airport.

When overcrowded services refuse to turn clients away, the quality of that service can suffer, Mr. Cummings said this week.

"You put six people in a room that's designed for three. Those are the sort of things you do."

That would change if York residents matched the average United Way contribution in Ontario — \$16 per person, per year. So far, our average is only \$7.72.

Mr. Cummings acknowledged many residents here donate through workplaces in

Toronto, contributing to that city's United Way.

But he suggested each community should look after its own needs.

Campaign volunteers have worked for months to convince businesses here to become more involved in local fundraising.

They've confirmed 169 employee campaigns, including 25 new ones.


"We had a team of about 50 business leaders making calls since April," said Mr. Cummings, an ex-Unionville resident and married father of four daughters who has "lived, worked and played in York Region" since 1975.

The Sept. 14 campaign kick-off — with airplane and helicopter rides from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. — coincides with the private airfield's annual open house.


"It's a fun day. Kids just have a great time," Mr. Cummings said.

Both events and parking are free.

"We have a variety of family activities planned, and would especially like to invite people who've never visited their local airport to drop by," said Derek Sifton, vice president of Toronto Airways Limited, which operates the facility.



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