



**United Way**  
Waterloo Region  
Communities



## News Release

### **United Way Waterloo Region Communities (WRC)**

**For Immediate Release – April 17, 2026**

#### **United Way’s Spirit Awards Gala celebrates Community Leaders Creating Stability across Waterloo Region**

**[Waterloo Region, ON]** United Way Waterloo Region (WR) proudly hosted its 8th Annual Spirit Awards Gala on April 16th, 2026, at Tapestry Hall in Cambridge.

Attending the gala were over 300 local community leaders, dignitaries, supporters, and changemakers, recognizing the incredible individuals, organizations, and workplaces that are making an extraordinary impact in Waterloo Region.

“This celebration recognizes those voices and volunteers in our community that have dedicated their time and energy to help others in need create a better life,” says Joan Fisk, CEO of United Way Waterloo Region. “The Spirit Awards is about community-building and recognizing the best of the human spirit. It highlights the groups and workplaces that have taken philanthropy – and community responsibility – to the next level. Working collectively, these individuals and organizations have fostered social stability for our neighbourhoods and cities in the face of tremendous economic and social uncertainties – and for that, we thank them, and we recognize them,” Fisk added.

Led by Master of Ceremonies (MC) Scott Hebert, a local healthcare leader, community advocate, Rotarian, and volunteer, the gala event celebrated attendees and supporters that helped United Way WR raise millions of dollars that were distributed to more than 50 local charities in 2025.

The event also featured inspiring stories of impact and volunteerism. It culminated in the presentation of the 2026 Spirit Award winners:

- Community Impact Award: **The Child Witness Centre**
- Outstanding Workplace Campaign (Small– to Mid-Size): **Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario**
- Outstanding Workplace Campaign (Large): **Equitable**
- Spirit of Community Award: **Women United Committee**

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**United Way Waterloo Region Communities**

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- Volunteer of the Year Award: **David Farhood**
- Ken Seiling Community Leader Award: **Karen Wilkinson**

In her acceptance of the Ken Seiling Community Leader Award, Karen Wilkinson commented:

“We’ve come a long way in the community in terms of the development of social services. But unfortunately, we’re forced to continue to develop these services because the community need is so great. It needs you, and this need isn’t going away any time soon. So, I want to thank the volunteers – and all of the people doing the work in our funded agencies – and I want to encourage you all to stay involved! Speak to your neighbours and encourage them to get involved. If you know someone that’s looking to help their community, ask them: What are they passionate about? Where do they want to make a difference? Because everyone can,” Wilkinson said in her acceptance speech.

United Way Waterloo Region extends sincere thanks to the event’s sponsors:

- TMMC (Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada)
- Morris Wealth Management of RBC Dominion Securities
- KPMG
- Lazaridis School of Business and Economics
- SV Law
- Tapestry Hall
- P&H Milling Group

### **About United Way Waterloo Region:**

United Way Waterloo Region is dedicated to helping people live better lives in every one of the seven communities we serve, and we focus on understanding issues and solutions unique to our community. Thanks to generous donors and partners, we are privileged to collaborate with people, non-profits, and businesses to empower multiple innovative, impactful, and measurable solutions. We are fundraisers and local community builders that support a network of agencies whose programs and services are locally focused, informed, connected, and deeply invested in helping people reach their full potential. To ensure critical agencies, programs and services get the funding they need, and to ensure donors have a clear line of site to the work we do, we have focused on cause-based giving which allows for donations to be directed in a way that aligns with selected priorities and goals.

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To learn more, connect with us at [www.uwaywrc.ca](http://www.uwaywrc.ca)

### **Digital Assets:**

Please visit [www.uwaywrc.ca/about-us/communications/](http://www.uwaywrc.ca/about-us/communications/) to download our digital assets and further information, including photos, CEO bio and photo, and other United Way materials.

For more information or for media interviews, please contact:

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