

# United Way Ready to Receive Applications for Assistance

## NONPROFIT: SDG&E Pledges \$1 Million to the Fund Assisting Low-Wage Workers

■ By DONALD BLOODWORTH

While the federal government combats the economic repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic with a monumental \$2 trillion economic relief bill — in addition to extending national quarantines to April 30 — here in San Diego, the United Way of San Diego County is taking emergency measures of its own. The nonprofit — in the middle of celebrating its centennial year — launched a Worker Assistance Initiative to provide relief funding for basic needs like food, utilities and rental and mortgage payments for low-wage workers hit hard by widespread closures.

San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) has committed to a \$1 million donation, made available by its Neighbor-to-Neighbor program, and The San Diego Foundation has donated \$300,000, respectively, as well. In the fund's first week, over 4,000 applications to donate were filed. The link to donate can be found at [uwsd.org/donate/covid19/](http://uwsd.org/donate/covid19/).

### Tourism Grinds to Halt

Tourism and service-based industries are the most impacted across the country, and especially in San Diego. It's estimated that nearly 200,000 of San Diego's full-time employees work in these sectors, with a third of those workers falling into the low-wage category.

ApartmentList.com's latest economic data show low-wage "non-essential" workers that are unable to work from home, deemed "high risk" for joblessness,

comprise 13 percent of San Diego's full-time workforce. Out of the nation's top 50 metropolitan cities that are home to "high-risk" low-wage, and "non-essential" employees, San Diego ranks number 10.

Nancy Sasaki, the chief executive officer of United Way of San Diego, County says her organization will address the challenges faced by the community head-on. "In response to COVID-19, our organization has quickly organized and stands ready to assist our most vulnerable working individuals and families living paycheck to paycheck and struggling to make ends meet. It is imperative we act now to provide immediate aid to our neighbors during this trying time and call upon our community to unite and support San Diegans being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19," Sasaki says.

SDG&E's Chief Operating Officer Caroline Winn said coming together during this time is imperative. "Many people are already hurting out there, facing job loss, food insecurity, evictions and other hardships through no fault of their own. We will help as many of San Diego's most vulnerable community members as we can through the challenging months to come," Winn said. "Some will expand their food

distribution, others like 211San Diego (the local nonprofit hotline for emergency relief) will be a resource to direct people to appropriate services, and still others are exploring ways to address myriad of other issues nonprofits and individuals are facing."



Caroline Winn



Nancy Sasaki

### Record Unemployment

National filings for unemployment benefits skyrocketed this month with a record 3.28 million claims reported from the Labor Department, eclipsing those of the Great Recession in 2007 and 2008. As recently as February the national unemployment rate sat at a 50-year historic low of 3.5 percent, but now, projections for May put the rate in the 12% to 13% range; the highest rate ever recorded.

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and American Community Surveys from the Census Bureau show the ability to work from home is more attainable for those with higher incomes. In 2018, a 51% majority of respondents who earned over \$100,000 a year said they were able to work from home, while just 15 percent of workers earning \$25,000 and below reported they were able to do the same.

Quarantine conditions likely won't great-

ly affect well-paying programming job. But jobs where the location and the physical nature of the work are inextricable, tend to offer lower wages. This presents a dichotomy that leaves many of the San Diego's — and the nation's — more vulnerable employees even more susceptible to joblessness and economic stress during this unprecedented downturn.

### Part of Community Response Fund

The Workers Assistance Initiative is part of the San Diego COVID-19 Community Response Fund launched on March 16 — with officials maintaining six feet of social distance throughout the press conference — led by Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, in partnership with San Diego County, the San Diego & Imperial Counties Labor Council, and alongside United Way of San Diego County, SDG&E and The San Diego Foundation. \$6.5 million has been raised for affected San Diegans

"The United Way is ready to receive applications from San Diegans affected by the economic downturn caused by COVID-19. They are a great partner, a dynamic community resource, and through their programming are on the frontlines to help people who struggle with food security, rental and utility assistance and income replacement or gap funding," Fletcher said. To learn more about donating, volunteering or receiving emergency relief, visit: [uwsd.org/covid19/](http://uwsd.org/covid19/). ■



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