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TOP STORY

Be Healthy Berrien wins big at 'Pop Up' fundraising event

By ROBERT NOVAK HP Staff Writer

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Caprice McDonald, a YMCA community wellness coordinator, pitches an idea for Healthy Corner Stores during a Pop Up Giving event sponsored by the United Way of Southwest Michigan on Thursday night at Lake Michigan College's Welch Center.

Don Campbell / HP staff

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Caprice McDonald was all smiles Thursday night after receiving a large check from United Way of Southwest Michigan.

McDonald presented on behalf of Be Healthy Berrien for a chance to win money for the organization at United Way's fundraising event Pop Up Giving, which was held at the Lake Michigan College Welch Center in Benton Township. Among the three nonprofits that pitched their community-oriented projects, Be Healthy Berrien won first place for their plan to connect local stores with food vendors in low-income communities.

McDonald said Be Healthy Berrien will use the total cash earnings of \$1,620 for generational change.

"We're looking to build systemic change," said McDonald, who is the community wellness coordinator at the YMCA of Greater Michiana. "Food distribution is affecting generations of families and communities, so if this can impact at least one layer of that path, then we're succeeding."



Amanda Drew, a senior director of impact strategies at United Way of Southwest Michigan, talks about a 2-1-1 Social Service Hotline during a Pop Up Giving event sponsored by the United Way of Southwest Michigan on Thursday night at Lake Michigan College's Welch Center.

Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Thursday's event incorporated elements from the show "Shark Tank," where attendees voted with ballots on which participating nonprofit was the most deserving of the prize money.

An initial \$1,200 from United Way was combined with the overall proceeds from ticket sales to make the winning prize.

“It’s fast, fun and gives people the opportunity to create an instant impact,” said Jennifer Tomshack, marketing and communications director at United Way.

Tomshack said United Way used to hold multiple Pop Up Givings every year; however, this was the first time the event has been held since 2019.

“We used to try and hold this event every quarter before the pandemic,” Tomshack said. “We were supposed to have a Pop Up Giving at Silver Harbor in late February 2020, but that was obviously canceled, so now we’re finally bringing it back.”



Maureen Ovington, Berrien College Access Network director, talks about career technical education during a Pop Up Giving event Thursday at Lake Michigan College’s Welch Center.

Don Campbell / HP staff

Among the other nonprofits vying for the grand prize were Berrien College Access Network and the Michigan 2-1-1 social service hotline.

“We’re especially excited because this is the first time we got to focus on our internal United Way projects,” Campaign Relationship Coordinator Erin Glaske said. “When we’ve done this in the past, the projects have always been from funded impact partners, which are the programs throughout Berrien, Cass and Van Buren (counties) that United Way funds.”

Berrien College Access Network offers more than 60 courses for students – as young as ninth grade – to hone in on specific skills for a career. The nonprofit’s goal is to break down barriers that restrict students from pursuing secondary education.

2-1-1 operates as a call center that refers citizens to affordable resources in their area. The hotline aids in a plethora of issues from medical care to food assistance. After the event, 2-1-1 and Berrien College Access Network also received consolation cash prizes of \$250 each.

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