

Community Says ‘Thank You’ To United Way President Stacey Rein Retires After Nearly Three Decades

As Su Marcy takes over the helm of the United Way of Ulster County, accolades continue to pour in for Stacey Rein, who recently retired as United Way President after 28 years. She leaves behind a legacy of which she and the agency can be proud.

During her tenure at the United Way, the agency distributed more than \$21 million to local programs addressing everything from homelessness to substance abuse prevention. In her words, it took talent, a good supporting staff, a bit of luck and good timing to achieve all that she did over the years, and Rein will likely be remembered as one of the nonprofit’s biggest stars, loudest cheerleaders and fiercest warriors.

Under her leadership, the Raising HOPE mentoring program was born, helping hundreds of women break the cycle of poverty, domestic violence and substance abuse. She also built a solid volunteer base, networked with the right people and created clever ways to fill the gap after corporate giving dropped in the 1990s.

That’s really where Rein’s story in Ulster County begins. The year was 1994 when she left her job as Executive Director at The Community Action Agency in Dutchess County to become President of the United Way of Ulster County. At the same time, IBM announced that it was pulling out of Kingston.

Rein, 66, remembers the initial shockwaves and aftermath like it was yesterday.

“I got a phone call from one of my colleagues, who said, ‘What were you thinking? Are you crazy? IBM is leaving. Why would you take this job?’

“I smiled. I like a challenge and felt I would be the right person to deal with that transition. The board wanted someone who would create a competitive grant process. I had done a lot of grant writing, so we were able to implement that process, and once we did, the agency’s visibility and positive image increased.”

That’s not to say it was all smooth sailing. Rein said IBM’s departure resulted in a “tremendous loss,” especially in corporate giving.

“We’ve seen a dramatic change in corporate culture, across the board, that has prevented

United Way from being visible in the workplace. We went from partnering with 120 workplaces in 2000, where 95 percent of our income had come from, down to 50 in 2021.”

To make up for the loss, Rein and her team worked tirelessly to attract new business support and began hosting special fundraisers like “Dancing With The Stars-Ulster Style,” Day of Caring and “A Celebration of HOPE.”

The United Way also picked up valued partners like the Bruderhof, Ulster Savings Bank and the Dyson Foundation. A real game-changer came in 2018 when the NoVo Foundation stepped in with significant funding, allowing the United Way to expand programs and services and hire three new employees, including a part-time marketing coordinator and two full-time Raising HOPE staff.

Helping others meant going the extra mile during the COVID-19 crisis. The United Way took a leading role by administering Ulster County’s Project Resilience feeding and childcare programs.

The agency also partnered with other nonprofits such as the Worker Justice Center of New York and the Ulster Immigrant Defense Network to help immigrants who were not eligible for government benefits.

“Together, we developed applications in Spanish so they could access our emergency and homelessness prevention funds. The folks we were helping were working predominantly in restaurants, hotels, housekeeping and construction. All these industries were on pause, and there was no income coming into these households,” Rein said.



While these highlights stand out in her career, Rein said she looks back at her overall role as a “true gift.”

“I have met and worked with amazing people from all walks of life—those who are caring, compassionate and devoted to making the world a better place. I could not have asked for a better or more satisfying job,” she said.

Yet it could have been a much different ending for the New Rochelle native, who once considered a career in show business. She had inherited the performance gene from her mother, Ruth “Rookie” Rein, and would often accompany the one-time entertainer to the theater while she was growing up.

With stars in her eyes, the young Rein landed roles in productions like “Fiddler on the Roof,” “Peter Pan,” “Bye Bye Birdie” and “Guys and Dolls” and could belt out a song and light up a stage like Ethel Merman.

As a 16-year-old, she even caught the eye of a New York agent while playing the role of Muriel Tate in “Plaza Suite” in the summer of 1972. Smitten by her acting chops and natural humor, he encouraged her to pursue comic theater.

After graduating from Northwestern University’s School of Education and Social Policy, she turned down a position at the Cook County Juvenile Court in Chicago, where she had interned, and returned to New York City to see how far she could go in musical theater.

Rein got gigs at dinner theaters in Cape Cod and Nantucket, while studying voice and acting and working temp jobs in between.

Luckily for the untold thousands she would one day help, Rein found the stage unfulfilling

and set her eye on something more meaningful.

“I learned it wasn’t for me. There was an emptiness to it. I didn’t feel the emotional connections I had in my human service work,” she said.

“As a young person growing up between the Bronx, one of the poorest communities in New York, and Scarsdale, one of the wealthiest, I was always struck by the disparities between the two and made a vow that I would do something about it. I wanted to level the playing field so that everybody had the same opportunities.”

As she enters retirement, she spoke of the respect and admiration for her successor, former United Way Vice President Su Marcy, who she worked with for 18 years.

“We’re very fortunate to have somebody who knows this agency inside and out. Our major contributors were all relieved that we were promoting from within. Everybody knows Su. She is highly respected and will continue the agency’s legacy of compassion.”

Since her recent retirement, she’s had more time to read, care for her flower garden and take long walks. She even joined a women’s golf league and has gone kayaking a time or two.

“I feel like a little kid with no responsibility,” she said. “I have to admit that it feels a little strange.”

Now that Rein no longer has the starring role at the United Way, she is enjoying more leisure this summer and plans to seek part-time work in a local human service agency this fall.

Asked if she has any regrets about not sticking with showbiz, Rein insists she made the right choice.

“Part of what I loved about this job was that I did get to perform occasionally, emceeing for a variety of different events—the United Way’s and others—and then, of course, there was my routine with Drew Andrews in this year’s ‘Dancing with The Stars.’ I call it my ‘swan song salsa.’”

The United Way of Ulster County is located at 450 Albany Avenue, Kingston. They can be reached at (845) 331-4199 or at ulsterunitedway.org.

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