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## Wisconsin BBB Grants First Charity Seal in the State

(Milwaukee, February, 2007) – Five thousand and still counting. That’s the latest number of registered nonprofits in Wisconsin. Faced with a continually growing number of charities, it’s no surprise that donors are confused about which organizations should receive a piece of the donation pie. The Wisconsin Better Business Bureau (BBB) is hoping that its recent seal program will make the charity evaluation process much easier to swallow. This week, it awarded the first charity seal in Wisconsin to United Way of Greater Milwaukee.

Charitable giving is up both locally and nationally, with 92% of households contributing to a charity in the last year (up from 80% in October 2005), according to the latest donor survey by Harris Interactive. The same study found that only one in 10 Americans strongly agree that charities use donations honestly and ethically. That is why evaluations from third-party organizations like the Wisconsin Better Business Bureau are important.

“The evaluation requires complete transparency on the part of the charity,” explained BBB President/CEO Randall Hoth. “And it gives donors peace of mind to know that the BBB has evaluated the organization for them. We want donors to give with their heart, but make decisions with their head.”

To receive the seal, charities must pass the BBB Wise Giving Alliance’s 20 Standards for charity Accountability. To be evaluated, charities must complete a detailed questionnaire and submit a variety of items including:

- latest annual report
- list of board members / governance information
- IRS Form 990
- latest financial statements

The program is open to all 501(c)3 charities in Wisconsin and is 100% voluntary. The submitted materials are reviewed and analyzed by the Wisconsin BBB Charity Review Department to determine if the charity meets the 20 Standards for Charity Accountability. United Way of Greater Milwaukee is one of the first few local United Ways in the country to receive the seal (nationally, United Way of America has also received the seal.) On average, only 65% of charities qualify.

“We know that donors and businesses are increasingly concerned with accountability,” said Sue Dragisic, president of United Way of Greater Milwaukee, “That is why the charity seal from the Wisconsin BBB is so important.”

Reports for a number of Wisconsin charities are available online at [www.wisconsin.bbb.org](http://www.wisconsin.bbb.org). The reports show whether a charity meets the 20 standards, and are meant to provide a clear idea of the organization’s mission, how and where its programs are carried out, who governs the charity, and how much of each dollar is spent on the charity's programs. The Better Business Bureau’s Wise Giving Alliance recommends a minimum of 65% spent on programs. Locally, nearly 90% of every dollar contributed to United Way of Greater Milwaukee is invested in programs.

“We congratulate United Way of Greater Milwaukee for voluntarily participating in our charity review program and for being a leader in the charity community,” Hoth said. “Donors should feel confident about giving to an organization that is so willing to be transparent to the BBB.”

**About The Wise Giving Alliance:** *The Alliance was formed in 2001 through the merger of the National Charities Information Bureau with the Council of Better Business Bureaus’ Foundation. The merger partners offer over a century of combined experience in charity evaluation. The Alliance has evaluated nearly all major national charities, including United Way of America which has also qualified for the seal. BBB local charity review programs have followed, raising the total number of evaluated charities into the thousands.*

**About United Way of Greater Milwaukee:** *United Way of Greater Milwaukee has been fulfilling its mission of improving lives for nearly 100 years by investing in what matters most. United Way makes the biggest difference by bringing together resources from the whole community to provide a safety net of services and break the cycle of poverty. Last year, United Way improved the lives of over 370,000 people.*

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