

One in a *Ver* Million

Meet Kelsey Collier-Wise

By David Lias

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Kelsey Collier-Wise knows there's much to learn in her role as executive director of United Way of Vermillion.

"Officially, I started on May 1, but I really didn't get started on the job until last Friday (May 4)," she said. "So I've really been on the job for about a week now."

She finding that her familiarity with the Vermillion community is a definite plus as she learns the ropes of her new job.

"I lived here from the time that I was about 2 to 5, and then from 9 to 18," Kelsey said.

After graduating from Vermillion High School, she left for Minneapolis to pursue an undergraduate degree at the University of Minnesota.

"And then I moved back here after I completed my undergrad," Kelsey said. "I was just kind of itching to

get back to Vermillion that whole time."

In 2009, she received her juris doctorate from the University of South Dakota School of Law, and before taking on her new role, she worked as an adjunct professor at the law school.

Kelsey and her husband, Royce Miller, are the parents of a 2-year-old daughter, Aurora.

United Way has been active in the Vermillion community for several years, providing a method for citizens to donate funds. Those funds, in turn, are allocated to several local agencies, or "partners," ranging from Meals on Wheels and The Welcome Table, to Vermillion Public Transit and the Vermillion Area Arts Council.

The focus of United Way is identifying and resolving pressing community issues, as well as making measurable changes in communities through partnerships with schools, government agencies,

businesses, financial institutions, community development corporations, voluntary and neighborhood associations, the faith community, and others.

The issues that United Way offices throughout the nation focus on are determined locally because of the diversity of the communities served. However, the main focus areas include education, income and health.

"One of the things that the board (of directors) wants to do with my position is to focus it on being out in the community," Kelsey said. "It will be less-focused on clerical duties and be more involved with really focusing on fundraising and community duties. It's a part-time position ... and the things that I'll really be focusing on in the next few months are meeting with all of the agencies that we fund, and trying to find ways to get their stories out, and being able to use those stories to let people in Vermillion know what United Way is and why it is important.

"Vermillion is extremely generous, and we have a lot of people who are long-

time supporters of the United Way, but there are also a lot of gaps and a lot of people who don't really know what United Way does," she said. "I'm going to try to get into those gaps and niches and that maybe haven't been reached yet and make United Way more of a household name."

Kelsey hopes to increase United Way's presence on the USD campus.

"We're hoping to do more work there, and really engage both faculty and students more," she said. "They've done a really good job of starting a campus campaign, but since they are our biggest employer, there's so much room to do more."

She also hopes, in the process of telling the stories of the agencies that rely on United Way funding, to help Vermillion citizens gain an added awareness of the needs in the community.

"It's very easy to be comfortable in Vermillion. That's one of the reasons why I love it and why I wanted to come back," Kelsey said. "But because of that, I think sometimes people don't realize how many people are struggling, and how we have so many great programs that are addressing those needs.

"That's why it is important to get the story out of how these programs really are reaching people that wouldn't have other



options when it comes to food to eat or educational opportunities for their kids or health services," she said.

Three major areas addressed by the United Way of Vermillion are education, health and income programs. "All of the agencies that we support fall under one of those target areas. There is a lot of need in Vermillion in all of those areas."

Kelsey participated in her first meeting with the United Way of Vermillion's board of directors on May 10.

"It's a really great board, made up of dedicated people, and many of them have been serving for many, many years," she said. "These people are really hard-working, so I'm really looking forward to working

with the board because I think they will really help me learn the ropes. They have the institutional knowledge, and they know the agency inside and out."

Over the years, Kelsey has also worked with several of the agencies that receive United Way funding.

"The idea of getting to tell their stories and talk about all of the great things they are doing is going to be a really fun thing," she said. "I'm kind of a Vermillion cheerleader, and the idea of getting to promote the really cool things that my favorite people in Vermillion are doing is probably going to be the part of the job that I'm going to enjoy the most."

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