

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BAUW



In front, from left: Ann Wenz, Georgeanna Mehr, and Leslie Luther-Jeschke. In back, from left: Curries Gasche, Julie Mulligan, Judy Stetson, Pam Conroy, Susan Morris, Dee Dee Gallagher-Johnson and Chrissie Mena. The Power of the Purse committee visits Vera Bradley at the Deer Park Town Center. Leslie Luther-Jeschke is holding the store's donated gift bag for the upcoming event on March 1.

The Power of the Purse

The Barrington Area United Way Hopes Success is in the Bag

A WOMAN'S PURSE IS A MICROCOSM of her life. It tells her stories and speaks to the many roles she plays. A glimpse inside reveals crumpled receipts, favorite lipsticks, and relied-upon technologies. Bandages and salves speak of her ability to heal wounds big and small. And though it may seem to weigh her down from time to time, her purse is also evidence of her purchasing power. The Barrington Area United Way (BAUW) hopes that area women will soon reach for that other purse standby—their wallets—and use their power for the greater good.

When Leslie Luther-Jeschke, executive director of the BAUW, learned of the Power of the Purse fundraiser, she knew it had the potential for success. "It is, quite simply, women empowering women in the Barrington area. This initiative reflects the reality that women in our community have a strong impact on economic and quality-of-life issues," Luther-Jeschke said. She hopes that

this event will inspire and increase the number of area women committed to philanthropy. All proceeds from the event will be granted to an area organization assisting at-risk women and children.

The luncheon, to be held on March 1, 2012 at the Onion Pub in Lake Barrington, will feature a silent auction of 30 purses. Attendees are asked to contribute \$100 to become a founding member of the Power of the Purse; members will be honored with a commemorative badge, a listing in the program, and a special gift. The event committee, co-chaired by Pam Conroy, Dee Dee Gallagher-Johnson, and Currie Gasche, hopes that at least 100 women will join at this level. "We're well on our way, which will help us make a very impactful \$10,000 program grant to the inaugural recipient," said Gasche.

A silent auction of purses will also contribute to the event's success. Bags will range from sleek designer to rustic weekender, and several will include gift certificates for restaurant, spa, and hotel

services. Artisan-made purses fashioned of sumptuous fabrics and eco-friendly bags crafted of renewable materials will support women's initiatives worldwide.

The event's pièce de résistance, however, is a designer handbag donated by American fashion designer and Barrington native Cynthia Rowley. Made of subtly metallic leather, the bag includes a charming note handwritten by Rowley to the bag's future owner: "Whenever my grandmother gave me a new purse, she included a lucky penny. Here's yours. XOXO, Cynthia."

Barrington merchants are also partnering with Power of the Purse. Katie Kuempel, owner of Angelina at 200 South Cook Street, has donated a one-of-a-kind bag made by resident Judy Tolle. "I'm thrilled to be a part of Power of the Purse. Programs like this one help create a healthier community on so many levels," said Kuempel. Dylan Nelson of the Doghouse has assembled a canine-themed bag—a treat for humans and four-legged friends alike. Melissa Bingham, a local event planner, is facilitating the donation of a purse by Lucas Mejia Designs.

The BAUW is in its 53rd year of service to the community, having allocated more than \$3.5 million in support to area organizations. It's an independent United Way, which means that 82 cents of every dollar donated feeds local resources in need. In 2011, the BAUW funded 34 programs run by 20 agencies, including Barrington Youth and Family Services (BYFS); CareerPlace; the Barrington Area Council on Aging (BACOA); Hospice and Palliative Care of Northeastern Illinois; Barrington Adult Counseling; Barrington Giving Day; Walk On Farm; and the Roy Wilmering Scout Cabin.

"We use the Healthier Barrington Needs Survey, given every three years, as a primary tool to identify this community's most pressing needs," said Luther-Jeschke. The 2011 survey, which was administered to 4,000 households (524 responses were received), indicated that unemployment and financial stability, health insurance, youth (self-esteem and drug and alcohol abuse prevention) were the most-cited concerns. "By responding to the needs indicated by the survey, the BAUW ensures that the primary needs of the community

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BAUW



TOP: Katie Kuempel, owner of Angelina's in Barrington, has donated a purse made by Judy Tolle of Barrington.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CYNTHIA ROWLEY



LEFT: American fashion designer Cynthia Rowley, a Barrington native, has donated a designer handbag for the event.

are met," said Luther-Jeschke. "Donors can feel confident that agencies and programs are thoroughly vetted."

While grantmaking is a key function of the BAUW, their services extend well beyond financial support. "In addition to program funding, Barrington Area United Way is working in collaboration with community partners to eliminate the underlying causes of our most serious issues," Luther-Jeschke said. She and other BAUW board members serve on many community coalitions, including the Barrington Area Drug Prevention Coalition; H.E.R.E. (Help, Encouragement, Resources, Education); the Healthier Barrington Coalition; the Barrington Cultural Commission; and the Barrington Employment Forum. "I think it's really important that the agencies that support these areas of critical need in our community work together."

Luther-Jeschke understands that donors become attached to certain organizations or causes—that's only natural. "But people also recognize the importance of partnering their donation with other dollars to make the greatest impact," she said. This focused investment of funds, coupled with a circumspect allocations process, defines the BAUW. "We bring people, resources, and expertise together to improve the health of our community."

In March, attendees of the Power of the Purse event will see this synergy in action. They will surely leave with glad hearts and satisfied appetites—and a fabulous new bag to boot. U



Renee Blue is a frequent contributor to Quintessential Barrington. She is looking forward to attending the Power of the Purse event.

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