



September 25, 2009

## Essay winners write about family

*BY KRISTINA SMITH HORN*

*Watchdog/enterprise reporter*

FREMONT -- Since her grandfather died nearly two years ago, Deanna Gillingham spends his birthday eating at his favorite restaurant, Cracker Barrel.

She and her family order his favorite cake, German chocolate. At the end of the day, they write their names on a balloon and release it in his honor.

The family ritual honors the man Deanna, a fifth-grader at Woodmore Elementary School, remembers as the person who cheered her up when she felt down.

That's why she chose to write about him for the United Way of Sandusky County annual essay contest. Her recollection of him and his role in her life won her first place in the contest in the fifth and sixth-grade category.

Other winners and finalists talked about their parents and things they do together.

"My family is very important in my life because they make me feel special," wrote Trey Ruhlman, a third-grader at Immaculate Conception School in Port Clinton and first place winner for the third and fourth-grade category. "My parents teach me to be honest and respectful. They help me with my homework so I can get good grades in school because that is important."

Deanna, Trey and other winners read their entries during the kickoff breakfast for the agency's annual campaign. The contest theme this year was "Gotta Love Parents."

"We asked them to write essays on someone in their life and why they're important to them," said Linda Havens, United Way of Sandusky County executive director. "We had two people write about grandparents."

Winners received prizes including pizza and a movie for a family of four, ice cream for a family of four and video rentals and popcorn for a family of four.

"We wanted the prizes to be things they can do with their family," Havens said.

About 130 people -- including representatives from agencies United Way benefits and local businesses -- heard the winners read their entries during the breakfast at the Fremont Country Club.

They gathered to support United Way and its effort to raise money for needy people in the community. Agencies United Way benefits include a local domestic violence shelter and Community Christmas, which provides a toy and presents to local children.

"The dollars are well, well-used in this community," Havens said. "I think I'm very fortunate to live and work in Sandusky County. Everyone is supportive, and they believe in what they do.

"There's so much teamwork."

United Way needs to raise \$371,911 to meet its goal by the end of the year.

Despite the recession, giving has been strong in Sandusky County, Havens said. Individuals also have been very supportive by having part of their pay check deducted as a donation throughout the year to United Way, she said.

"In the challenging times, we have met our goal or are very close to it, whereas some of our sister and brother agencies have not," she said. "Sandusky County is a strong county."

## Additional Facts

**United Way of Sandusky County's goal for 2009 is \$865,000. So far, it has raised \$493,089.**

**Special drawing winner** -- Alerik Scully, third-grader at Otis Elementary School

---



REAU



GILLINGHAM



DICK



RUHLMAN



WARNER



CRAIG



GILLINGHAM



HUMPHREY