

Making a Fantastic Place Even Better: Juneau Radio Center's "Big Fat Check"

By United Way of Southeast Alaska



If you listen to the radio in Southeast Alaska, chances are you'll tune your dial to a Juneau Radio Center station: KJNO, KINY, KXJ, Taku 105 and Mix 106, as well as partner stations in Sitka and Ketchikan, translated region-wide. And if you tune your dial to a Juneau Radio Center station, chances are you'll hear a public service announcement about "The Big Fat Check."

But what is "The Big Fat Check"?

This year, for the first time, Juneau Radio Center has joined forces with the United Way of Southeast Alaska to raise charitable contributions for, and awareness of, the United Way and its 33 non-profit partner agencies, from Yakutat to Metlakatla.

"Juneau Radio is concerned about everything that concerns our community," says Richard Burns, who, along with his wife Sharon, owns and operates Juneau Radio Center through the couple's private company, Frontier Media,

LLC. "The Big Fat Check" was his brainchild.

"We've got this great media platform, and the United Way does so much for so many people," he says of the original idea. "We thought: why not work together?"

Through targeted on-air, online and social media public service messaging, "The Big Fat Check" campaign directs listeners to various collection points throughout Southeast Alaska, including the Juneau Radio Center, itself. At the end of the year, the Radio Center will tally the donations and present the United Way with, well, a "big fat check." Every dollar goes toward supporting the organizations under the United Way of Southeast Alaska umbrella, which range from hospice care in Haines to social services in Sitka, youth initiatives in Ketchikan to senior centers in Juneau, not to mention those serving the region as a whole, such as the Salvation Army and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"Southeast Alaskans are extremely generous," says Burns. "The average person wants to give back to the community. We're just presenting an opportunity."

In many ways, "The Big Fat Check" campaign reflects the Juneau Radio Center's commitment to public service, and Burns' own sense of corporate responsibility. Juneau Radio Center donates nearly \$1.4 million a year worth of free promotional airtime to local community groups, in addition to regular community-based programming, such as "Capital Chat", "Action Line" and KINY's Problem Corner. For nearly a decade, the Radio Center has run the "Look Local First" campaign, aimed at supporting Juneau's local economy. And Burns, himself, is an active local volunteer, who recently completed a year serving as president of the Greater Juneau Chamber of Commerce, which named him Citizen of the Year for 2010.

"We're always looking to use our infrastructure for the general good," says Burns. "If someone needs our help, they've just got to ask."

However, sometimes this works in reverse. For "The Big Fat Check," Juneau Radio Center actively sought out the United Way.

"If you want to do marketing, you go to the experts in marketing," he explains. "If you want to do community service, you go to the experts in community service. And that's the United Way."

Indeed, data indicates that one in three people will use either the United Way or a United Way partner agency at some point in his or her lifetime. In Southeast Alaska, average family size is 2.5. Statistically speaking, this means the United Way of Southeast Alaska will touch every family's life in some way, shape or form. Moreover, the United Way brings together multiple organizations, government offices, business leaders and individuals to identify issues and coordinate efforts.

"Giving to the United Way gives you the most bang for your buck," says Burns.

He's right. According to United Way statistics, a donation of one dollar a week (\$52 a year) provides healthy, nutritious meals to five shelter residents or a reading mentorship for two children. Five dollars a week (\$260 a year) sends two campers to Boy or Girl Scout camp, or flies two domestic violence survivors to a shelter on Prince of Wales Island. Ten dollars a week (\$520 a year) provides activities for five seniors, pays for a six-week GED prep course for five young adults or sponsors the enrollment of 17 children in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which sends each child one free book every month for the first five years of life (that's 1,020 books, total!).

Of course, while the "Big Fat Check" primarily focuses on maximizing donations, it's also aimed at advocacy.

"Whether or not people wind up giving money—obviously, I hope they do—that's only part of our goal," Burns explains. "The other part is raising awareness of all the good work the United Way is doing."

In addition to satellite collection points, donors can contribute at the Juneau Radio Center or online at www.unitedwayseak.org/big-fat-check-0. "The Big Fat Check" campaign runs through the fall, the holiday season and on into early spring 2019, although, Burns notes "there's no time like the present."

"Working together, we can all make a fantastic place even better," he says.

To learn more about the United Way and its partner agencies, visit www.unitedwayseak.org. The website also details donation, volunteer and advocacy opportunities across Southeast Alaska.

