

Press Release



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Bay Area Law Firms Go Bananas for Charity in the 2009 Koko Challenge 21st Annual Competition Raised Over \$1 Million for Bay Area Community

SAN FRANCISCO, December 17, 2009 – Yesterday evening, the Bay Area General Counsel Group and United Way of the Bay Area (UWBA) announced the 2009 Koko Challenge Award winners during a ceremony hosted at the San Francisco offices of Sonnenschein, Nath & Rosenthal. The 21st annual Koko Challenge recognized local law firms for running exceptional United Way fundraising campaigns by excelling in total dollars raised, innovation and enthusiasm.

This year, 18 participating firms raised \$1.366 million for charitable causes, setting a standard of excellence in philanthropy for the business community. Despite the economic downturn, funds raised by the Challenge increased by 10.5% over 2008. The 2009 top award recipients, recognized by firm size, were:

- Baby Koko (1-45 attorneys) – Bryan Cave
- Little Koko (46-100 attorneys) – Paul Hastings Janofsky & Walker
- Big Koko (100+ attorneys) – Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP

Each winner received a furry, stuffed toy gorilla based on Koko, the female gorilla who learned sign language and had her own pet cat. Many of the winning firms display their “trophy” in a lobby or other prominent location to showcase their organization’s accomplishments and impact on the community.

This year, United Way presented the Silverback Award to Kevin Haroff, a partner of Shook, Hardy & Bacon. The Silverback Award recognizes a partner-level attorney for his or her extraordinary efforts and personal leadership during the campaign.

This year’s “Top Banana” award was given to Stephanie Blazewicz an associate at Bryan Cave for her enthusiasm and dedication as the coordinator of the firm’s United Way campaign.

Six firms new to the Koko Challenge competed for a special “Rookie of the Year” award. Reed Smith was named Rookie of the Year for their impressive use of best practices and excellent results.

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Other award recipients included: Gibson Dunn & Crutcher; Gordon & Rees; Jones Day; Kecker & Van Nest; Morrison & Foerster; Ropes & Gray; Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal; and Winston & Strawn.

The other 2009 Koko Challenge participants were Davis Wright & Tremaine, DLA Piper, Goodwin Procter, Filice Brown Eassa & McLeod, Shook Hardy & Bacon, and Squire Sanders & Dempsey. Hanson Bridgett LLP and Folger Levin & Kahn did not participate, but made significant gifts in support of the campaign.

“We at United Way congratulate and thank the Bay Area legal community for their exceptional fundraising efforts in this year’s Koko Challenge. Despite the tough economic climate, the firms and their attorneys stepped up, and even increased their giving over last year,” said Anne Wilson, chief executive officer of UWBA. “This year’s Koko Challenge included a special emphasis on volunteerism, and once again the firms responded in force, donating over 500 hours to United Way projects throughout the year.”

The Koko Challenge was created 21 years ago to offer Bay Area attorneys -- known to be highly competitive, yet generous and caring -- a direct link to local health and human service philanthropy through an enhanced partnership with United Way. Since that time, more than 50 Bay Area law firms have contributed more than \$23 million to Bay Area nonprofits through this annual event.

Koko Challenge winners are selected by a volunteer committee comprised of Bay Area General Counsels and senior attorneys. This year’s committee included Michelle Banks of Gap, Inc., Nancy Greenan Hamill of The Law Offices of Nancy Greenan Hamill, Richard S. Kopf of The Fremont Group, Jay J. Price of Bank of America, William R. Sawyers of Ernest Gallo Clinic and Research Center, and James Strother of Wells Fargo and Co. For the first time, the volunteer committee expanded to include partners from three Bay Area law firms: Bradley Bugdanowitz of Goodwin Procter LLP, Charles Custer of Gordon & Rees LLP, and Michael W. Kelly of Squire, Sanders & Dempsey LLP.

About United Way of the Bay Area

United Way of the Bay Area is a nonprofit organization that creates pathways out of poverty. We focus on helping working families and individuals, ensuring they can meet all of their basic needs, while creating opportunities for them to achieve lasting financial stability. We also invest in programs that empower the next generation for success. United Way convenes partners across sectors, advocates for policy change, runs community programs and educates residents about the issues most vital to a resilient community. Founded in 1922, United Way of the Bay Area serves Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Solano Counties. For more information, visit www.uwba.org.