

Lucky enough to give?

The stock market is way down. The value of your home may be heading underwater. Your retirement account is a shambles. Has there ever been a tougher time to ask people for donations to the United Way?

Not that we can recall.

And yet, all over Chicagoland, people are doing just that. They're asking. And Chicagoans are responding. They're responding for the same reason they send help to an area hard hit by a hurricane or flood or other natural disaster. Because other people need it. Because they have a little to spare. Because they know these hard times won't last. And because they know they'll feel better helping someone else.

We thought about that instinct to give recently when actor Paul Newman died. He had been a superstar for decades, a sex symbol and idol. When his film career started winding down, he could have retreated to the golf course or the casinos in Monaco. He didn't. He marketed his homemade salad dressing, had his face slapped on the label. Then came popcorn and spaghetti sauces and other products. Hundreds of millions of dollars—all the profits from those sales—were donated to charities, including his camp for seriously ill children. That is an achievement far beyond fame.

Of course, most of us can't match generosity on that scale. The beauty is: You don't have to.

You give what you can, and you're entitled to feel as satisfied as Newman did.

With the United Way, you know that donation goes directly to the people who need help most in communities across the area. United Way helps kids stay in school and graduate. It helps battered women seeking shelter. It helps seniors and the disabled live independently. It helps people suffering substance-abuse problems get treatment or job training. Working families that need child care. And those who just need a meal.

Last year, for the first time, charitable donations exceeded \$300 billion in America, according to the Giving USA Foundation. Three out of four of those dollars came from individuals, not corporations. Many of those donations were in small denominations.

Many Americans are hurting financially. That's familiar terrain for the United Way. Did you know the Chicago-area chapter was created in the depths of the Great Depression, as the best way to combine individual and company resources to directly help struggling families?

Then, as now, there were people fortunate enough to be able to give, despite the financial convulsions. Does that describe you this year? If so, please remember the United Way and those who aren't so lucky.