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# Helping laid-off workers is his job

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As a child, Ray Oost and his family spent two years living in the basement of the Salvation Army in Owensboro, Ky.

His father was a union carpenter and did work around the church. And his mother gave her time ringing a bell for the Salvation Army's Red Kettle campaign.

It was there, Oost said, he learned about community service.

"That's when I got involved. I've been involved with it all my life, you might say," he said.

"It wasn't hard for me to follow up."

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Oost is going into his ninth year as the AFL-CIO community services liaison, a United Way position that has been in existence

for 60 years. There are 14 such posts in the state and 195 across the country.

With high numbers of manufacturing jobs, the Midwest has the highest number of the positions. In recent months, the Tri-State has seen a number of people laid off, including 500 workers at Whirlpool and another 160 from the closing at Collis, Inc.

As workers lose their jobs in the community, Oost can assist them in finding out what resources and social service agencies are available.

With the recent layoffs, his role will become even more important.

"This may be a tough year here," he said. "I'd say I'm going to get more calls than ever now. It will increase tremendously."

Part of Oost's job includes providing training to workers, so they can be mini- liaisons at their companies - learning about some of the social service agencies and the United Way's 211 line, a referral telephone line.

People needing help locating services or volunteer opportunities can dial 211 to get connected to local agencies.

"They're not aware of 211 or how you can get that information so quick," Oost said.

He also works closely with WorkOne Evansville when it goes into a job and counsels workers who may be displaced.

Oost works in nine counties, but he also has worked outside those counties when called.

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The first time he worked with displaced workers was in 1999, when Emge Packing Co. in Fort Branch, Ind., closed its doors and laid off more than 300 workers.

He also has worked with employees from the coal mines, General Electric and Kroger.

"It's heartbreaking to see people leave their jobs," he said. "Any of them are sad."

Oost brings knowledge of labor unions. He retired in 1998 from Whirlpool after working there for 34 years.

At Whirlpool, he worked in the machine shop as a head operator. In the mornings, he would arrive at the plant before the other workers to prepare for the day, including laying out the necessary tools.

It was important for him to know everyone's job on the assembly line, he said, because if someone was unable to come in, he might have to take over for them.

But one thing that remained constant while he worked at Whirlpool was his work with community services. He served many times as Whirlpool's chairman for the United Way's annual campaign.

"I've been involved with them all my life," he said. "I always enjoyed working in community services."

As he looks to the future in the community, he said, it is important to prepare.

"Preparing is a main thing," he said. "Day to day, it's hard to do."

And he said, no one should be ashamed or embarrassed to ask for help.

"I'll talk to anyone," he said. "We're out here to help people."

## Your Turn

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**Posted by mwhite on January 15, 2007 at 10 a.m. (Suggest removal)**

Thank God for selfless people like you and others like you that are there to help people in need. God bless you!

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**Posted by janrn44 on January 15, 2007 at 7:35 p.m. (Suggest removal)**

Ray  
thank you for all you do to help people in our community

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