

This Day in History... October 16, 1887

The United Way

The United Way traces its beginnings to October 16, 1887, when a priest, two ministers, and a rabbi met in Denver, Colorado, to find a better way to help their struggling community. That meeting led to the creation of an organized, citywide effort to coordinate charitable giving—a movement that would eventually grow into the United Way of America.

At the time, Denver was facing serious social problems in the wake of the gold and silver booms. Many residents were unemployed, hungry, or sick, and the city lacked an organized system to care for those in need. The four religious leaders realized that sporadic collections and scattered charities were not enough. They envisioned a more efficient system—one united campaign to raise and distribute funds where they were most needed.

Together, they founded the Charity Organization Society, which brought together ten local health and welfare agencies under one coordinated effort. Their group collected donations, distributed funds to charities, and helped people in need find the right services. They even provided emergency assistance to those who couldn't get help elsewhere. In its first year, Denver residents raised \$21,700—a remarkable amount for the time—to support 22 agencies, providing food, shelter, and medical care for countless struggling families.

The success of Denver's united campaign inspired others across the country. In 1913, the first official Community Chest was founded in Cleveland, Ohio, following the same principle: unite charitable giving to make it more effective. Citizens and businesses contributed to one central fund, which was then distributed among local social service organizations.

United Way was founded in Colorado.

By 1918, representatives from twelve fund-raising groups met in Chicago to form the American Association for Community Organizations (AACO)—the direct forerunner of the United Way. The movement quickly expanded. There were 39 Community Chests by 1919, 353 by 1929, and more than 1,000 by 1948. Even during the challenges of the Great Depression and World War II, these local groups continued to thrive, proving the lasting power of community cooperation.

Other fundraising efforts with similar missions appeared as well, such as the Red Feather Drive and the United Fund. In 1948, several Detroit charities—including the city's Community Chest—merged to form the United Foundation, one of the first large-scale combined giving campaigns. Over time, many local programs began adopting the name United Way, and by 1970, the national organization officially became known as the United Way of America.

In 1973, the United Way formed a unique partnership with the National Football League (NFL) to increase public awareness of social service needs nationwide. NFL players, coaches, and owners appeared in public service announcements, attended events, and helped raise funds. The partnership brought national attention to United Way's mission and showed how sports and service could work hand in hand.

The organization's reach expanded even further in 1974 with the creation of United Way Worldwide, connecting similar programs around the globe. That same year, United Way chapters in the US and Canada raised more than \$1 billion for the first time—a historic milestone in charitable fundraising.

Some of the United Way's major recipients include the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Catholic Charities, American Cancer Society, and The Salvation Army.

In 2009, United Way International and United Way of America officially merged to form United Way Worldwide, now the largest privately funded nonprofit organization in the world. Today, there are 1,800 United Way branches in 41 countries and territories, all working toward the same goal: strengthening communities by improving education, promoting financial stability, and ensuring access to health care.

Every year, nearly 2.9 million volunteers and 9 million donors contribute their time and resources, raising an average of \$4.7 billion worldwide. What began as a small gathering of four compassionate leaders in Denver has grown into a global force for good—proving that when people unite to help others, entire communities can be transformed.



Stamp issued for the United Way's 100th anniversary. It was controversial at the time as the USPS had a rule against issuing stamps for charitable organizations.



The Giving and Sharing stamp reflects the spirit that inspired the United Way's creation—people coming together to help their communities thrive.



The United Way's long-standing partnership with the NFL promotes stronger communities through programs like Character Playbook, which teaches students leadership and empathy, and Play 60, which inspires kids to stay active and healthy.

This Day in History... October 16, 1887

The United Way

The United Way traces its beginnings to October 16, 1887, when a priest, two ministers, and a rabbi met in Denver, Colorado, to find a better way to help their struggling community. That meeting led to the creation of an organized, citywide effort to coordinate charitable giving—a movement that would eventually grow into the United Way of America.

At the time, Denver was facing serious social problems in the wake of the gold and silver booms. Many residents were unemployed, hungry, or sick, and the city lacked an organized system to care for those in need. The four religious leaders realized that sporadic collections and scattered charities were not enough. They envisioned a more efficient system—one united campaign to raise and distribute funds where they were most needed.

Together, they founded the Charity Organization Society, which brought together ten local health and welfare agencies under one coordinated effort. Their group collected donations, distributed funds to charities, and helped people in need find the right services. They even provided emergency assistance to those who couldn't get help elsewhere. In its first year, Denver residents raised \$21,700—a remarkable amount for the time—to support 22 agencies, providing food, shelter, and medical care for countless struggling families.

The success of Denver's united campaign inspired others across the country. In 1913, the first official Community Chest was founded in Cleveland, Ohio, following the same principle: unite charitable giving to make it more effective. Citizens and businesses contributed to one central fund, which was then distributed among local social service organizations.

United Way was founded in Colorado.

By 1918, representatives from twelve fund-raising groups met in Chicago to form the American Association for Community Organizations (AACO)—the direct forerunner of the United Way. The movement quickly expanded. There were 39 Community Chests by 1919, 353 by 1929, and more than 1,000 by 1948. Even during the challenges of the Great Depression and World War II, these local groups continued to thrive, proving the lasting power of community cooperation.

Other fundraising efforts with similar missions appeared as well, such as the Red Feather Drive and the United Fund. In 1948, several Detroit charities—including the city's Community Chest—merged to form the United Foundation, one of the first large-scale combined giving campaigns. Over time, many local programs began adopting the name United Way, and by 1970, the national organization officially became known as the United Way of America.

In 1973, the United Way formed a unique partnership with the National Football League (NFL) to increase public awareness of social service needs nationwide. NFL players, coaches, and owners appeared in public service announcements, attended events, and helped raise funds. The partnership brought national attention to United Way's mission and showed how sports and service could work hand in hand.

The organization's reach expanded even further in 1974 with the creation of United Way Worldwide, connecting similar programs around the globe. That same year, United Way chapters in the US and Canada raised more than \$1 billion for the first time—a historic milestone in charitable fundraising.

Some of the United Way's major recipients include the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Catholic Charities, American Cancer Society, and The Salvation Army.

In 2009, United Way International and United Way of America officially merged to form United Way Worldwide, now the largest privately funded nonprofit organization in the world. Today, there are 1,800 United Way branches in 41 countries and territories, all working toward the same goal: strengthening communities by improving education, promoting financial stability, and ensuring access to health care.

Every year, nearly 2.9 million volunteers and 9 million donors contribute their time and resources, raising an average of \$4.7 billion worldwide. What began as a small gathering of four compassionate leaders in Denver has grown into a global force for good—proving that when people unite to help others, entire communities can be transformed.



Stamp issued for the United Way's 100th anniversary. It was controversial at the time as the USPS had a rule against issuing stamps for charitable organizations.



The Giving and Sharing stamp reflects the spirit that inspired the United Way's creation—people coming together to help their communities thrive.



The United Way's long-standing partnership with the NFL promotes stronger communities through programs like Character Playbook, which teaches students leadership and empathy, and Play 60, which inspires kids to stay active and healthy.