



PRESS-REGISTER

211 hotline can help residents in need

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By **SUSAN DAKER**
Staff Reporter

United Way of Southwest Alabama formally unveiled a 2-1-1 telephone number Thursday to connect local people experiencing health and human-service needs to agencies that can help them.

The hotline has been available for the past few months to those calling from Mobile and Washington counties and most of Clarke County, according to Angelo Miller, executive director of the United Way chapter, and Kerry Cohen, director of marketing and communications for the agency.

The special number will also be used to provide information in the event of a hurricane, Miller said. People taking calls at that time could relay details on evacuation routes and places to get ice and other supplies, he said.

Cohen said the United Way is still working with some telephone companies in Clarke County to ensure that people pay no charge for placing the calls.

At present, callers can reach the service from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Eventually, it will be extended to 24 hours a day and to Choctaw and Monroe counties, Cohen said.

A 2-1-1 line has also been available in Baldwin County for about a year, according to Brenda Lee, president of the United Way of South Baldwin County. She said the agency was planning an announcement next month.

The Baldwin service also has a Web site, 211baldwin.org. United Way of Southwest Alabama does not serve Baldwin County.

People who call 2-1-1 are connected to a corresponding agency that can seek to assist them. Those agencies can address a large number of needs and issues, such as:

Food, temporary shelter, utility assistance and other basic human needs.

Physical and mental health resources, including substance abuse education, counseling and crisis intervention.

Employment support, including job training and education programs.

Support for older people and those with disabilities.

Support for children, including tutors, mentor opportunities, protective services and after-school programs.

Volunteer opportunities, including where people can donate items and how they can help at shelters.

Miller said the United Way of Southwest Alabama has been working with supporters and allies for about five

years to put together the service, which began in Montgomery in 2002.

At Thursday's news conference, Gigi Armbrecht, who chairs the 2007 United Way Board of Trustees, said radio spots advertising the special number will soon be aired. Armbrecht is regional manager of AT&T.

Examples of calls already placed to the service included:

A man reporting that his son was using drugs and he didn't know what to do about it. He was connected to the Drug Education Council.

A 19-year-old saying that a friend of his had been raped and had been drinking and using drugs ever since. He was connected to the Rape Crisis Center and the Drug Education Council.

A woman reporting she did not have enough food for her family. She was given the address of a church with a food pantry within walking distance of her home.

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