

November 28, 2018

United Way of Marion County Thermometer

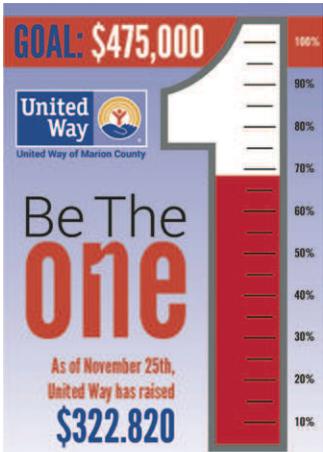


Image courtesy of United Way of Marion County

As of Nov. 25, the United Way of Marion County has raised \$322,820 of its 2018 goal of \$475,000.

SPORTS



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Marion County native Mike Caputo to retire from UMWA after 22 years

by John Mark Shaver

STAFF WRITER

After 22 years of service, including nonstop advocacy for coal miners in the state Legislature, United Mine Workers of America International District 31 Vice President Mike Caputo is stepping down.



Caputo

Caputo, who is also a 22-year member of the West Virginia House of Delegates representing Marion County's 50th District, said his retirement from the UMWA will officially begin at the end of December; — a place he's worked at since 1996.

"It was a tough decision," Caputo said. "When you've got a job that you truly love, it's 'Do I want to keep doing this or do I maybe move over and let someone else do it for a while and enjoy retirement?' The union was good to me. It was a tough decision. It wasn't like leaving the workplace or leaving the mine. It's kind of like leaving a family."

A third-generation coal miner, Caputo began working at the UMWA almost 20 years after becoming a coal miner in 1977 at 19 years old.

"I knew very early that I wasn't going to go to college, and I wanted to make a good living, so the mines seemed like the way to go," Caputo said. "I was always interested in unions and organizing and things like that, and I always thought it would be cool to be



Staff photo by John Mark Shaver

UMWA benefit services representative Jack Frazier, International District 31 Vice President Mike Caputo and retired International District 31 field representative Joe Reynolds discuss business during one of Caputo's final days at work.

in a mine workers union. I had thought that since I was a little kid. I remember the strikes, and how they had to fight and struggle for everything they achieved, and that always intrigued me."

Joe Reynolds, a retired UMWA District 31 international field rep, has known Caputo for more than 40 years, and the two worked alongside each other, both in the mines and the UMWA.

"He's one of the best people I've ever known," Reynolds said. "What sets him apart from most of the people I know is his compassion for his fellow human beings. That's the drive behind the energy he has... He'll be missed, but if we need him, he'll just be a phone call away."

Caputo got his first taste of union work in the late 1980s, when he began working on the Grievance Committee at his local union. The work only strengthened the bonds he had with his coal mining family, one that he looks back

on fondly.

"I enjoyed the camaraderie," Caputo said. "The guys were always fun. We got a lot of work done, but it was a joking-type atmosphere. It was good morale, and a good place to work."

Then, Caputo entered what he called a "whirlwind year" in 1996, being both elected to District 50 of the West Virginia House of Delegates — a seat he still holds — and being asked to work full time with the international union.

Caputo began his work with the UMWA as an international representative before becoming the West Virginia Coal Miner's Political Action Committee coordinator. From there, he became COMPAC coordinator for the eastern United States, overseeing five states, including West Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York.

Finally, in 2008, UMWA President Cecil Roberts asked Caputo to run for the association's International District 31 vice president



Staff photo by John Mark Shaver

UMWA International District 31 Vice President Mike Caputo hugs his longtime secretary Gloria Sandy as the two share memories of their many years together.

position. Caputo was elected and took office in early 2009. He's been there ever since.

"He's been instrumental in every fight that we've had here, whether it's a successful negotiation for a national contract or an issue with bankruptcies," Roberts said. "He's been arrested with me in St. Louis and other places. ... Mike has been very supportive to me and everything that I've done here. ..."

"There's no question that he'll be missed here. He was a great leader. ... and a good friend to me, and someone I've counted on when I needed someone to talk to or to be supportive of me. He's been there, and I'm very appreciative of him."

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