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Journalist Bob Woodruff greets a full house Monday at the Renaissance Hotel in North Austin. Woodruff and his wife are in Austin to present a seminar detailing their journey of recuperation after Bob's near-fatal encounter with a roadside bomb in Iraq.

Newsman recounts struggle after Iraq bombing

By: Katie Flores

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Bob Woodruff was a successful ABC news anchor when a roadside bomb exploded near him while on assignment in Iraq, leaving him in a coma and putting his life and career in doubt.

Woodruff and his wife, Lee, recounted their tale of Bob's recovery after his injury in Iraq Monday to guests at Wachovia's third annual speaker series to benefit United Way Capital Area.

"You don't have to be hit by a bomb in Iraq to know what it feels like to have a difficulty or a tragedy and then try and overcome it as a family," said Lee Woodruff. "I think it's a story a lot of people can relate to and it's a story of hope and it's a story of community, which is something United Way knows a lot about."

For the last three years, Wachovia has presented a speaker who they believe shows leadership and is at the top of his field said Bill Wilson, president of Wachovia's Central Texas region.

In 2004 they brought Rudy Giuliani and Tom Brokaw in 2005. Including this year's donation, Wachovia will have earned three-quarters of a million dollars for United Way, said Wilson.

Woodruff's family prepared for tragedy when a roadside bomb exploded near Woodruff on Jan. 29, 2006, while he was reporting, leaving him with near-fatal injuries to his head and left shoulder. Yet, 36 days later, Bob woke from his coma and started on his road to recovery, having to relearn English as a result of the blow to his brain.

"A year-and-a-half ago right after I woke up that I could actually become a journalist again, I didn't really think it was possible," Woodruff said. "I think there's a lot of people now that are sitting in the hospital injured with the same kind of injury; they probably assume they can't go back to what they're doing, and one of the things that's possible is that they might and that to me, in our situation, is remarkable."

A video of Bob's last day in Iraq was shown and ended just before the bomb went off. The couple walked on the stage to a standing ovation, sitting in front of hundreds of people telling their story and counting their blessings.

"Texas is a very big military state as well with Fort Hood not being so far away," said Lee Woodruff. "So in this area I think you all are sensitized to seeing a lot of families who either have a loved one deployed or maybe they've come back wounded, so its a relevant story for this area as well."

United Way Capital Area serves ten counties in and around Austin. In May, they reorganized their program to focus on three areas: education, financial stability and improving community health.

"If talent and time is there then the treasure will come," said David Balch, president of United Way Capital Area.

Lee Woodruff also recounted tales of soldiers who came back from Iraq with physical and emotional injuries and needed the financial and job search services organizations that United Way could provide.

"It's really wonderful to hear the new and amazing mission really of United Way because it really hits on the three parts that we all need to do as a community for these soldiers returning home," she said.

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