

NON-PROFIT NEWS

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Charities look for new talent

Want to set off a frenzy of hand-wringing and expressions of woe?

Just walk into any gathering of charity executives or board members and ask them who will make up the next generation of non-profit leadership.



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For years, people active in the charitable community here and around the country have bemoaned the fact that every time they go to a non-profit board meeting, they see the same people – and the faces

aren't getting any younger.

"I've been here just five months, but I'm on four or five boards already," said Jeremiah Ryan, president of Bergen Community College. "I'm talking to the same people all the time. It's great that those people are philanthropically inclined, but you need some new blood, some people with new perspectives."

Ryan and other non-profit leaders have no shortage of explanations for the problem:

People are working longer hours than ever before and their commitments to their jobs don't leave them much time for volunteering.

Modern society encourages people to focus narrowly on their own interests and discourages personal interaction, especially with people from different backgrounds.

The concept of spending a career with a single company is dying, and with its demise has come a more nomadic society. People simply don't spend as long in one place anymore, so they don't put down deep roots and grow a commitment to the community.

And it's particularly difficult to develop a sense of commitment to a greater community in an area like suburban North Jersey where people see themselves either as residents of a particular town or as part of metropolitan New York City.

Whatever the reason, members of the current generation of non-profit leaders in North Jersey agree that there's a critical need to find and develop the next generation.

That's essentially the inspiration for Bergen LEADS, a leadership development program being put together by the Volunteer Center of Bergen County in Hackensack. The center has received a \$31,250 challenge grant



TARIQ ZEHAWI/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

"We hope to encourage people to become more active in the community in a variety of ways," says David Warshaw, chairman of the advisory panel for Bergen LEADS, a planned leadership development program.

from the Redlich Horwitz Foundation in Saddle River to get the program off the ground. It needs to raise a matching amount by Dec. 31.

Janet Sharma, executive director of the center, said the plan is to establish a 10-month course of seminars and retreats that would attract employees with leadership potential from businesses, non-profit groups and government agencies.

"The opening seminar will be an overall look at what goes on in Bergen County, how communities work, how we interact in the metropolitan area and our demographics," she said.

After a first set of seminars focusing on critical public policy areas affecting the county, participants would be asked to put together a community service project, based on proposals from area non-profits.

"It's designed to draw people who are acknowledged and aspiring leaders," Sharma added.

Beyond offering academic classes, the program is also designed to bring together people from diverse backgrounds to develop long-lasting relationships.

"If somebody from white Ridgewood meets somebody from one of the black churches in Hackensack, then they're going to have that friendship throughout their lives," Sharma said. "As they grow in their careers, they'll know those people from different communities."

The leadership issue is serious for non-profits because they are being forced to evolve, said Ryan, a member of the advisory panel for Bergen LEADS.

"Eighty percent of them are small organizations," he added. "And they are evolving from mom-and-pop small businesses into something more sophisticated where they have a CEO who needs to understand not just providing service to clients, but also marketing, budgeting and administration."

In addition to generating new non-profit leaders, it's hoped the program will also generate more overall interest in charitable work, said David Warshaw, chairman of the Bergen LEADS advisory panel.

"We hope to encourage people to become more active in the community in a variety of ways: being on boards of non-profits, being active in their towns," said Warshaw, a retired General Electric executive who headed the company's global volunteer program.

Today the Ho-Ho-Kus resident runs his own consulting firm that works on getting businesses to provide volunteers for non-profits.

"Hopefully over the years we'll have an increasing cadre of people who know and understand the issues and are getting their sleeves rolled up and making changes," he said.

Businesses that nominate their

employees to participate would pay \$2,000 in tuition. But that pales in comparison to the potential corporate benefit, said John R. Smith, director of corporate responsibility for Public Service Electric and Gas Co. and also a member of the advisory panel.

"It will make them more sensitive to the issues affecting the people we serve," Smith said. "It helps our employees identify problems and solutions that would benefit our customers and our business."

Ideally, Warshaw said, the program will work to do more than simply create personal relationships and encourage individuals to become more involved in the community.

"Everybody's going to come to this program from their own sphere, their own group of people they know personally and professionally," Warshaw explained. "In other words, their own network. We have an opportunity to build a network of networks, people who have a common base of understanding of issues and what's possible – and the interest in doing something positive for Bergen County's communities."

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