Community service is a way to build business leadership

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Community service is way to build business leadership

Twin Cities area chambers believe encouragement of volunteers is important goal

"One is not born into the world to do everything but to do something."
—Henry David Thoreau

By Rebecca Erdahl

Minnesotans know that our quality of life is not a matter of serendipity. It happens here because we expect it of our businesses and community institutions. It happens here because we expect it of ourselves. It exits because we make sure that the right people come together at the right time to do the right things.

Perhaps this is best illustrated by the fact that the two largest local business organizations in the state — the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce — place the encouragement of community leadership as top priorities.

Cultivating leaders

In the 1970s and 1980s, both chambers realized that something as important as the Twin Cities’ future vitality could not be left to chance. They understood that we needed to cultivate leaders to take on the challenges of the future.

As a result, the Leadership Minneapolis program was founded in 1976 and Leadership St. Paul came along in 1980. Their missions are the same: to identify, cultivate, and inspire successive generations of community leaders — by examining critical issues and resources — to ensure the social, cultural, and economic prosperity of the Twin Cities.

Today, those programs count among their graduates some of the most prominent business and community leaders in the region, including Fast Citron, vice president of science and technology for Medtronic Inc.; Robert Gram, chief of the Minneapolis Police Department; Richard Hanson, president and chief executive officer of the St. Paul/South Metro Minneapolis district for Norwest Bank.

Each year, both Leadership St. Paul and Leadership Minneapolis bring together emerging leaders from the private, nonprofit and public sectors to study issues such as children and family, economic development, health care and criminal justice. Participants gain firsthand experience with leading authorities and visit facilities to gain first-hand experience. They emerge prepared and committed to making a difference.

Community service is a key component of both programs. In fact, it is a requirement of members in both programs.

Service projects enhance the leadership development experience by giving participants an opportunity to apply their business experience as well as their new leadership skills and knowledge in a way that makes measurable improvements to the community. The projects also give participants an acute sense of their power to accomplish great things by exercising personal leadership.

In late April, the 1998 classes of Leadership St. Paul and Leadership Minneapolis met to construct community and leadership projects to carry out during the upcoming year. The grand opening event, attended by members of the leadership classes, was held at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

Edwards, in his role as chair of the Leadership Minneapolis board, was pleased with the results.

"The events were powerful, inspiring and motivated," he said.

Cultivating leaders

The two organizations work in concert with the Twin Cities Area Foundation and the Minneapolis Area Foundation to build leaders for the current and future generations.

Editor's note: Arlen Hendricks

Editor's note: Arlen Hendricks, left, is the vice chair of community leadership for the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and is vice president of community relations & diversity for the Pillsbury Co.

Mary Schmidt is vice chair of education for the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce and is chief executive of Jeane Thome Inc.

About the authors