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Community service is a way to build business leadership

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Commentary

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 and Mary Schmitz

Minnesotans know that our famed 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 exists 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 nurturing 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



About the authors

► **Rebecca Erdahl**, 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 Schmitz** is vice chair of education for the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce and is chief executive of Jeane Thorne Inc.

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, these programs count among their graduates some of the most prominent business and

community leaders in the region, including Paul Citron, vice president of science and technology for Medtronic Inc.; Robert Olson, chief of the Minneapolis Police Department; Richard Hanson, vice president of the 3M Foundation; and Joan Grzywinski, president/district manager 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 education, economic development, health care and criminal justice. Participants discuss each issue with leading authorities and visit facilities throughout the community to gain first-hand experience. They emerge prepared and committed to taking action.

Community service is a key component of the leadership programs. In fact, it is now 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 compare notes and to share the lessons learned from their projects. The results were impressive.

Each leadership class created and took responsibility for completing five community service projects.

Leadership St. Paul's class undertook these projects:

► **Youth Hero Award.** Members worked with the United Way of the St. Paul Area to design an award that will highlight young people who are making a difference in the community and to engage youth in community service and leadership.

► **Humboldt High School Mentoring Program.** Members of the class paired with students at Humboldt High School to help them prepare for the world of work.

► **Habitat for Humanity.** This group joined with Habitat for Humanity to raise funds to restore a low-income housing development on St. Paul's West Side.

► **Deva House.** Team members are assisting Deva House in the development of a communications plan to support their fund-raising and marketing efforts. Deva House offers respite care and support for families of children living with incurable illness.

► **Downtown Garden.** Members of this group are working with several community partners to create a healing garden at St. Joseph's Hospital in downtown St. Paul. The garden will be designed to provide physical and spiritual refreshment for people who live or work downtown.

Leadership Minneapolis class members undertook these projects:

► **YMCA Black Achievers Project.** Class members are working with a group of college-bound students in grades 7 through 12 to develop a program to help them prepare for college entrance exams.

► **Simpson Housing Services.** These individuals are helping a transitional housing development for women and children by planning a marketing and communications program for the project and seeking donations from small businesses to execute the plan.

► **St. Joseph's HOPE Community Project.** This group is building a playground for the children of St. Joseph's HOPE Community at 2101 Portland Av. S. They will raise funds and do the actual construction.

► **Community Design Center.** These class members are organizing and carrying out a clean-up day at a garden site to prepare for the planting season. They also are designing and building a kiosk for neighborhood children to use in selling their produce.

► **St. Joseph's Home for Children.** Pairs of Leadership Minneapolis volunteers read to children at St. Joseph's Home at 1120 E. 47th St. S. on a weekly basis.

Do these efforts make a long-term difference? A 1996 poll of

1,000 Leadership Minneapolis graduates revealed that 85 percent of the respondents felt the quantity and quality of their community involvement had increased significantly as a result of their participation in the program. Leadership St. Paul graduates sit on virtually every community board in the East Metro area.

Both programs are open to people from all backgrounds and sectors. Successful applicants share one common characteristic: a desire to build their leadership skills and assume a key role in their businesses and the community. And both programs are currently accepting applications for their 1998-99 programs.

For more information on Leadership Saint Paul, call Kari Everson at (612) 265-2767. For information on Leadership Minneapolis, call Marilee DesLauriers at (612) 370-9181.



Your turn to comment

If you'd like to share your views on this week's Commentary or write an opinion piece for a future edition of Monday Business, we'd like to hear from you.

You also may contact us if you have opinions on other columns or articles that have appeared in the Business section.

Call 673-9071 and let us know what you think. Please leave your name, company, title and daytime phone number. Or you may fax your opinion to John Oslund at 673-7122. Or send it to his e-mail at: oslundj@gw.startribune.com.

Reader responses

Apple applause

Editor's note: Arlen Britton's Commentary May 11 on Apple Computer and the media elicited much positive feedback from Macintosh fans. Here's a sampling.

admit it: I am a big Macintosh fan. Sadly, I must agree with Arlen Britton that much of what we read about Apple Computer and the Macintosh just doesn't square with the facts. I truly appreciate, and applaud, your staff's effort at presenting a balanced picture through today's article.

Paul Olson
Hendricks, Minn.

(ever heard of those?) PC (\$99 in 1985), and graduated to a Commodore.

When I started using a Mac at work in 1987, it was instant bonding. I've had four Macs. I do most of my work from home.

As Britton pointed out, the media's coverage of Apple has been very biased. But I blame Apple for a lot of their problems. They have one of the most versatile and powerful computers on

Hurray, Mr. Britton and Hur-

Fixed Rate