

New corporate partners rare for nonprofits

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Local nonprofit organizations have had an increasingly difficult time finding new corporate partners because of a lack of major corporations moving into the Philadelphia area.

"There's not that many major corporations based here in the region," said Marlene Olshan, CEO of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Southeastern Pennsylvania. "Of those that are here, every nonprofit is targeting them. The ones that do move in already have their chosen nonprofit or philanthropic institution that they're working with, so we do find it difficult."

Those in the nonprofit industry agree with Olshan's assessment.

"Nonprofits have to be more innovative to look for more money, and they have to look for places that give money and volunteers and board support," said Sharon Gallagher of Sage Communications Partners, a public relations firm specializing in nonprofit clients.

Many nonprofits, however, have been lucky enough to formulate existing partnerships that are mutually beneficial to both the corporate citizens and the nonprofits.

One such longstanding partnership exists between Wachovia Bank and the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging (PCA). The two companies have worked together for 10 years, dating to the since-acquired CoreStates Bank, said Kevin Dow, the community affairs manager for the Pennsylvania region of Wachovia.

"We provide them with general operating support, so they could provide ancillary services for their clients," Dow said. "That's the most difficult type of funding to get, so we tried to help with that."

One of the major collaborations between the partners is an awareness campaign within Wachovia to watch for elderly customers potentially having fraudulent withdrawals taken from their accounts.

"Wachovia is a big partner with us, and we did a whole training session on banking fraud to educate their tellers," said Joan Zaremba, director of marketing and corporate relations for PCA.

The program focuses on training tellers how to recognize financial exploitation of the elderly.

"There's actually legislation that provides for banks and other institutions to make referrals to adult protection services if they feel a senior is at risk," said Linda Mill, a senior vice president for Wachovia's Northeast Region. "In the first six weeks of the pilot program, we protected \$750,000 in

endangered assets. It's something our people feel very positive about because our people are able to help these seniors."

In addition to Wachovia, PCA has relationships with Peco Energy Co., Smith Barney and the Reading Terminal Market, which hosts a Thanksgiving dinner every year for 350 seniors who would otherwise be home alone for the holiday.

Zaremba also said the health-care industry has a lot of opportunities to share programs with PCA, including companies like Independence Blue Cross, GlaxoSmithKline and Albert Einstein Health Care Network.

Wachovia shows a commitment to helping area nonprofits through its Wachovia Regional Foundation, which was founded when First Union Bank bought out CoreStates Bank. The foundation provides multiyear grants for neighborhood revitalization.

The relationship between Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Peco has lasted long enough that a Peco official sits on the board of directors of Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

"They've been a long-time supporter and, more recently, they've stepped up to the plate even more significantly," Olshan said. "We're very pleased with them and the support they give us."

In addition to financial support, Peco has 20 mentors in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program.

Olshan said her organization researches potential partners to find companies with similar objectives.

"Part of what we do is we look at the company's mission statement to see if they discuss community outreach and bettering the neighborhoods in which they do business," she said. "I don't think there's a high success rate, but the ones we do get are long-term, solid relationships from which we get volunteers, money and leadership."

Some of those relationships include partnering with Comcast, Aramark and the law firms of Cozen O'Connor and Fox Rothschild, as well as the University of Pennsylvania's Robert A. Fox Leadership Program, which provides a rich source of volunteers for Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

Another major contributor to the nonprofit arena in the region is the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, which has maintained many of its corporate partnerships.

"Our leadership overwhelmingly consists of business leadership in the community," said Alba Martinez, its president and CEO. "We're always looking for opportunities to engage new companies and new businesses into the campaigning process."

believes that corporate citizens, including United Parcel Service, Tasty Baking, Sovereign Bank and Comcast, are drawn to the United Way because the organization benefits the community in which it is based.

"There's a reason for these partnerships; it's not about charity for us," she said. "It's about strategic, community-based problem solving. There are problems that need to be resolved for our economy to grow the way that it needs to, and we're not satisfied with just helping people in need. That really resonates with the business community."

Although long-standing ties to specific organizations can make it more difficult for nonprofit organizations to create new relationships, Martinez said the process benefits nonprofits because there is loyalty from market to market.

"Often, companies call us to get involved because United Way is really a national organization," she said. "Joe Natoli, the head of Philadelphia Newspapers Inc., was a strong, successful leader in the United Way in Miami. He understands the importance of United Way and its role in the community here. These are the kinds of people who reach out to us."

Martinez estimated about 1,200 corporations are involved in the United Way's campaign, resulting in the organization receiving 72 percent of its funds from workplace campaigns.

The United Way, she said, has not reached its potential, though.

"There is room for growth, and this United Way is very committed to growing our funds, so we can grow our impact," Martinez said. "We work with anyone who has a workplace and an investment in this region. We give a vehicle for the business community to get involved."