

Nonprofit Chamber is an advocate for the advocates

BY JESSICA LINDSEY

There are many nonprofit groups in the Wichita area that work hard to provide

assistance to a wide variety of people. But the leaders of those groups noticed there wasn't much collaboration. They were all islands unto themselves. That changed four years ago.



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Chamber of Service was developed with a clear goal to help area nonprofits collaborate so all can be more effective.

"It was a coming together of many nonprofits that realized there was a disconnect between groups," says Perry Schuckman, executive director of the Nonprofit Chamber of Service. "There are many duplicate services and things that could be done easier with collaboration."

By building relationships between nonprofit leaders and between nonprofits and area governments and foundations, everyone benefits, says Schuckman.

Expanding the possible

Members of the Nonprofit Chamber range from large to small organizations, each paying an annual fee. Based on a sliding scale, membership dues range from \$100 for a nonprofit that has annual employee costs of less than \$49,999, to \$2,500 for a nonprofit whose employee costs are \$18 million or higher. Employee costs include

staff salaries, taxes and benefits. Half the funding for Chamber operations is paid for by membership fees. The other half is covered by grants from Sedgewick County and foundations.

Similar to a traditional chamber of commerce, Schuckman says the nonprofit chamber provides members the opportunity to achieve things that may not be possible on their own.

"One business wouldn't have made a dent in achieving what was done at the airport," says Schuckman, referring to the campaign for affordable air fares in Wichita. "But the Chamber of Commerce was able to change the dynamics."

A focused effort

The Chamber's goal is to provide members with a knowledgeable and dedi-

cated voice for issues that affect the everyday activities of nonprofits.

For months the Chamber has helped organize efforts to pass a sales tax exemption bill through the Kansas House of Representatives and Senate.

The bill would make tax exempt all consumables purchases made by nonprofits. Some nonprofits are exempt and others aren't. Much of the problem is that smaller organizations can't or don't know how to request a tax exemption on consumable purchases, Schuckman says.

The savings could be substantial. Starkey Inc., which helps find work and services for people with developmental disabilities, has tax-exempt status for some purchases, but does not for consumable purchases. It estimates it could save \$30,000 should the measure pass.

Much more than networking

In addition to aiding nonprofits in governmental issues, the Chamber also offers educational opportunities for nonprofit leaders and volunteers.

"While there are benefits in training, networking and resource development that we receive as a Chamber member, we also believe a strong nonprofit sector is essential to our community," says Dennis Bender, president and CEO of the Kansas Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation, a founding member of the Nonprofit Chamber of Service. "To borrow from a familiar metaphor, the Chamber provides the tide that raises all nonprofit boats."



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Perry Schuckman, executive director, Nonprofit Chamber of Service

for nonprofit executives and more are available throughout the year.

The Chamber has an annual Board University that connects and educates existing nonprofit volunteers and staff members and also serves to recruit new volunteers.

"It helps train existing governance how to make sure things run smoothly," says Schuckman. "Nonprofit boards are made up of everything from a housewife to a physician. We try to give them good governance skills."

The training sessions cater to people of all backgrounds and interests, says Schuckman, because it is always useful to have a mix of individuals serving on boards.

The Chamber also organizes networking events similar to speed dating where executives from nonprofits and area foundations have a chance to go table to table to meet each other in hopes of making connections for funding.

When the Chamber was first formed it had 35 member agencies on its list. The group has grown to a membership of over 150 organizations and it is looking to attract even more by expanding its area of coverage.

Schuckman says the group plans to expand to cover much of southcentral Kansas and Salina, Hutchinson and Emporia.