

New program assists business philanthropy

Politicians aren't the only ones talking about values these days. The sad but steady stream of corporate scandals also has increased ethics and values discussions in many business boardrooms.

The discussion and resulting decisions are important. Translating business values into behaviors and the willingness to be publicly accountable for that behavior is the only true measure of how businesses demonstrate their commitment to those values.

A new program, Minnesota Business Gives, will assist businesses in demonstrating their commitment to one key value: supporting their communities.

Minnesota has long been recognized for its giving of major corporations. But many other businesses — including those with less than 20 employees — give just as generously, though invisibly.

That's about to change. Research conducted by Building Business Investment in Community (BBIC), a project of the Minnesota Council on Foundations, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and 12 other business and philanthropy organizations, found that a significant number of small- and medium-sized businesses throughout the state are generous givers. Giving by these privately owned businesses, however, is largely unrecognized because owners give locally and quietly, without making a public commitment.

Fortunately, the same BBIC research revealed characteristics that could help small- and medium-sized businesses demonstrate their commitment to community involvement and giving. The solution: to find local business leadership

and create local recognition options — in short, replicate and enhance the



Guest Opinion

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well-known Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce (MRCC) Keystone Program for Greater Minnesota, which recognizes giving at the 5 percent and 2 percent levels of pretax income. MRCC leaders recognized the opportunity and agreed to share the standards of the Minnesota Keystone Program so that it could become a part of Minnesota Business Gives.

Begun in January, Minnesota Business Gives is housed at the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Executives from local chambers of commerce throughout Minnesota provide leadership and implementation.

The program provides products and services to assist chambers and their business members, including a workbook to guide company leadership in giving; an assessment scorecard that helps them assess their giving program; education sessions; and a percentage giving recognition program. A Web site, www.minnesotabusinessgives.org, provides information to businesses.

Early Minnesota Business Gives activity is encouraging. Chambers from Hibbing, Cambridge, Willmar and Faribault are already participating.

As Minnesota Business Gives succeeds in adding business giving and community involvement to the agenda of local

chambers of commerce, it also is working to significantly increase the number of businesses that publicly commit to sharing 2 percent of their pretax profits in their community — to demonstrate this business value.

Although the program is young, the Florida Chamber of Commerce has already requested a meeting to discuss the possibility of replicating the program for its state.

The BBIC project officially concluded its work last month in Minnesota. It received national recognition from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for its research and the creation of the Minnesota Business Gives program in December 2004. As Minnesota Business Gives moves forward, it's important for the local community to recognize and thank all BBIC project members, especially the Minnesota Council on Foundations, which created and nurtured the project for four years.

With everyone's participation, Minnesota Business Gives will ensure that Minnesota retains our national leadership and reputation for business giving and community involvement.

Even more important, it will highlight the many faces and forms of business giving statewide. It will recognize those who make a public commitment to giving — honoring their willingness to translate business values into action, and encouraging others to do the same.

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