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Nonprofit Chamber expansion targets 10-county economic partnership area

Premium content from Wichita Business Journal - by Josh Heck

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The Nonprofit Chamber of Service is moving beyond Sedgwick County.

The organization, which serves as a unifying resource for area nonprofit organizations by providing training, seminars and networking opportunities, is expanding to include nonprofits in the 10-county Regional Economic Area Partnership area.

The chamber is conducting training sessions and seminars in Butler, Reno and Harvey counties, in hopes of attracting new members.

So far, the chamber says, it's paying off.

The six-year-old group added 28 organizations from outside Sedgwick County last year. The nonprofit chamber has about 200 members, 63 of which were added in 2010.

The concerted effort to grow its membership base is a way for the nonprofit organizations in the region to collaborate and share resources when necessary, say those involved.

"We're trying to build a more collaborative nonprofit system," says **Perry Schuckman**, executive director of the nonprofit chamber. "That membership side is really what gives us the resources to be able to do some of these things."

The nonprofit chamber's expansion was funded with the help of a \$50,000 grant from the **Kansas Health Foundation**, which was awarded in 2009 and expired in January.

Steve Coen, president and CEO of the Kansas Health Foundation, says the nonprofit chamber received the grant because many of its members are involved with improving the health of the communities they serve.

"We really rely on those organizations," he says.

The grant helped pay for training sessions, discounted memberships and informational literature.

The cost of an annual chamber membership depends on the size of the organization and typically ranges from hundreds to thousands of dollars.

Schuckman says the health foundation grant also paid for the salary of a part-time employee, who worked with the chamber as part of a job co-op through **Wichita State University**. That person has since graduated. Schuckman is looking for another part-time employee, but that position won't be paid for through the grant.

Value added

Those involved with the nonprofit chamber say geographic boundaries shouldn't stop organizations for working together.

Colin McKenney, executive director of Multi-Community Diversified Services Inc. in McPherson, says it makes more sense for nonprofits to work together to share ideas and resources, especially when so many organizations have been hit by budget cuts and decreased revenue.

McKenney's organization joined the nonprofit chamber more than a year ago.

"It's just a great value in terms of all of the resources you have access to," he says.

Other membership-based organizations also are seeing their membership numbers increase. The **Wichita Independent Business Association**, for example, has added about 20 members in the past month, says president **Tim Witsman**. WIBA has about 800 members.

Witsman says membership-based organizations give businesses access to additional resources, such as a unified lobbying voice in Topeka, or face-to-face meeting opportunities with elected officials.

"That has a lot of value," Witsman says.

Nonprofit Chamber of Service

The organization is expanding its reach beyond Sedgwick County.

Target area: The 10-county Regional Economic Area Partnership boundaries.

New members: 28.

Offering: Training sessions, seminars and networking events.

Total membership: 200.

Founded: 2005.

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