

Group of Milwaukee executives forms Women's Affinity Alliance

BY CORRINNE HESS
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As business leaders struggle to recruit and retain qualified employees, a group of professional Milwaukee businesswomen has come up with an initiative to keep that segment of the population happily employed.

Leaders from several Milwaukee-area companies including Deloitte, MillerCoors LLC, Tempo Milwaukee, Robert W. Baird & Co. Inc., Brady Corp., Direct Supply Inc. and Quarles & Brady LLP have developed the region's first Women's Affinity Alliance. The group meets quarterly to develop female-focused programs for their own organizations while tapping into the best practices at each other's companies.



Johnson

"We always talk about retention and talk about recruitment, but we are not going to be able to attract people here because no one is willing to relocate in this economy," said Tracy Johnson, executive director of Tempo Milwaukee. "We have to retain the best employees we have now and stop the leaky pipeline of women."

Affinity, or networking, groups for minority populations at companies have been on the rise for several years, according to the Network of Executive Women, Chicago. However, women's affinity groups have grown significantly in recent

years with two-thirds of companies now offering female affinity groups, according to a recent survey from the Network.

While there are many industry-specific groups, Johnson believes the Milwaukee-based Women's Affinity Alliance is one of the only regionally targeted efforts.



Garrison

Tami Scully Garrison, community affairs manager at MillerCoors, said in forming the affinity alliance, the most surprising thing was that many of the area's "heavy hitters" didn't have affinity programs in place.

Miller Brewing Co. did not have an affinity group before merging with Coors Brewing Co., Golden, Colo., in July 2008. Coors had a robust program and Miller adopted those best practices, Garrison said. "It has been an amazing way to connect with the business that we did not previously have," she said. "I don't see this going away. If anything, they are only going to grow and make an impact. We want to make sure we're at the table, making an impact with them."

Deloitte's women's affinity group has been in place for 18 years. Krista Brookman, senior marketing manager at Deloitte, has been involved with the group, but was looking for a way to talk to professionals outside her industry for more peer mentoring.

Life changes, such as marriage and children

can sometimes shift priorities for women, she said. Talking to others who find themselves in a similar situation of balancing motherhood and career advancement is of great value, Brookman said.

"The true beauty of this new alliance is it is cross-industry so we get to come together and focus on the advancement and retention of women in all segments," Brookman said. "All of these great companies are doing this and there is something there we can learn from each other."

The alliance met for the first time in March, attracting about 40 female business leaders. Attendance doubled for the second meeting Oct. 6. A third session is scheduled for Jan. 31, 2012, and will feature Gail Lione, retired executive vice president of Harley-Davidson Inc. and retired president of The Harley-Davidson Foundation Inc.

"The goal is to get people to know this is a resource out there," Johnson said. "There are a lot of competing companies at the table, but everyone is sharing ideas on how to retain and recruit. We can all share strategies."

Goodman stepping down at First Stage

BY STACY VOGEL DAVIS
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Rob Goodman, founding artistic director and managing director of First Stage, is leaving his position but will continue with the organization in an emeritus role, according to a news release issued this week.

Goodman will transition out of the role throughout the 2011-12 season, the release said. The board has formed a search committee to find his replacement as managing director.

"Goodman was hired by the Milwaukee Performing Arts Center board of directors to found First Stage in 1987," the release said. "Under his leadership First Stage has grown to become one of the largest theater companies for young people and families in the nation, the third-largest theater company in Milwaukee and the only theater arts education program of its kind in the nation. During his tenure at First Stage Goodman directed more than 50 productions and commissioned more than 40 new plays."

In Goodman's emeritus role, he will work on a capital campaign to provide children with access to First Stage's shows and educational programs.

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