

Degree adds value to career in nonprofits

Ambitious, goal-oriented, and caring – and educated in strategic planning, problem-solving, and fund-development techniques targeted directly at her career – Leslie Andrus might be considered the new face of the nonprofit professional.



A campaign director in resource development at the United Way for Southeastern Michigan, Andrus is committed to serving the nonprofit sector. But she is also aware that with donations more precious than ever – particularly in the economically challenged Detroit area – nonprofits must be able to justify every dollar they raise and spend.

“In order to be competitive, nonprofits have to be more efficient,” she said. “The public is demanding that nonprofits act more like businesses. So organizations like ours have to be more logical, strategic, and organized.”

Andrus enhanced her fund-raising skills – as well as her career – when in 2007 she received a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, with a focus on nonprofit management and leadership, from Lawrence Tech’s College of Management. This new MBA concentration provided her with a unique blend of business and nonprofit competencies in a dynamic, community-focused learning environment.

“My work at the United Way and my education has gone hand in hand,” Andrus said. “All of the courses were really helpful, especially the strategic nonprofit courses, and the MBA as a whole helps me constantly. Prior to getting my MBA, I didn’t have much experience with finance or marketing. The classes gave me a sense of how all of the pieces come together.”

“These days, a lot of executive directors of nonprofits have MBAs, not social degrees,” she said. “For Lawrence Tech to offer an MBA with a nonprofit concentration is fantastic. There are lots of opportunities in the nonprofit field, and it’s important for people to know about this program.”

Andrus is more than happy to let people know about her “great experience” at Lawrence Tech, as well as the nonprofit profession.

“I think I’ve found my place in nonprofits,” she said. “It’s nice to wake up and know you’re doing things for people who need help.”

Skillman grant helping center promote Detroit microenterprises

If early interest is any indication, then entrepreneurship is alive and well in the City of Detroit, and microenterprises may be just the ticket to stimulate an economic boost for young city residents.

That’s the impetus behind a two-year, \$257,000 grant awarded by Detroit’s Skillman Foundation to the College of Management’s Center for Nonprofit Management at Lawrence Tech. The center is using the grant to support the Osborn Entrepreneur and Microenterprise Project in northeast Detroit.

Microenterprise is a proven business strategy for providing supplemental income for households that already have a wage earner. One study has estimated that the United States has the potential for 10 million microentrepreneurs – individuals seeking to start businesses with existing skills to supplement their income.

Microenterprises have fewer than five employees, and, in most cases, the owner is the sole operator and worker. They are frequently launched with the help of small loans of \$5,000 or less. Examples of

successful microenterprises include daycare, landscaping, transportation, and messenger services. They can generate thousands of dollars a year in supplemental revenue.

“We’re not looking to launch big new businesses,” said Robert Inskeep of the Center for Nonprofit Management, who serves



as the project’s program liaison. “Rather, we want to help people earn extra income.”

The project got off the ground in 2006 when a Skillman-funded study showed overwhelming interest from residents in the Osborn neighborhood about starting their own businesses. Survey results prompted the awarding of the grant through Skillman’s Good Neighborhoods Initiative, which was launched in 2005 “to transform Detroit’s neighborhoods into healthy, safe and supportive environments for children, youth and their families by working directly with concerned citizens and organizations in specific neighborhoods.”

Inskeep was delighted that the survey found that 13- to 18-year-olds were particularly interested in starting their own businesses. They also expressed a willingness to attend training sessions that would help them plan and launch a new business, or learn skills from successful owners of small businesses.

“Not only did youth and adults indicate a high degree of interest in learning how to start small businesses, but a number of business owners, school officials, and other community leaders indicated a willingness to help mentor and support future entrepreneurs,” Inskeep said.

With a project team that includes some Lawrence Tech student and faculty volunteers, as well as residents from the Osborn neighborhood, the program began by establishing the Osborn Business Development Center in northeast Detroit. There, participants will have access to basic entrepreneurial training, advanced business workshops, and alternative career placement activities to help them start on the road to success.

“The program is still in its infancy,” Inskeep said. “But it’s clear that many important conditions and resources already exist within the Osborn community necessary to create microenterprises and the entrepreneurs needed to run them.”

In fact, one of the program’s goals is to create a local, neighborhood organization that will continue to build on its initial success.

“We will utilize neighborhood resources as much as possible,” said Jerry Lindman, director of the college’s Center for Nonprofit Management. “The goal is the development of a sustainable



community network that will provide ongoing support for entrepreneurs and microenterprises.”

The Osborn project is just the kind of program Inskeep wants the center to be involved in as it creates opportunities for collaboration and service in the nonprofit sector.

“It’s partnerships like these that will help make sure that Osborn families will have all the resources and support they need to make their children successful in life,” he said. “It’s what our center was intended to do.”

“They don’t need to invent anything. All they have to do is offer something that is not available but is needed in their community.”