

## Economic Development Insight

### What's Your Hot Button?

*By Brianne Perigo*

I attended and recently graduated from the 2008-2009 Class of the Greene County Citizen's Academy. The knowledge I gained during the 8 month course has already become valuable to both my personal and professional life, the latter being especially true with our last session, "The Effective Board Member", presented by June Miller, Southern Regional Director of the Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network (INRN).

As I entered the room, a packet from the INRN was placed in front of each seat. The packet contained several handouts; one handout, with the heading "How to Be an Effective Board Member," contained a quiz listing 10 true or false questions. After everyone took their seats and introduced themselves, June instructed us to take a few minutes to answer the questions. The quiz proved to me that you don't know what you don't know; even though I work frequently with boards and committees, I only scored a fifty percent.

After the quiz, June delivered a PowerPoint Presentation. The first slide titled, "To Be an Effective Board Member", contained a list of three points; understand the nonprofit sector and role it plays in our community, learn about the organization and be passionate about its mission, and learn what is expected of you as a board member before joining. I was captivated. I didn't know that these three items needed to be considered before deciding to join an organization. So, let's look at each point.

How many of you serve on a board because someone you know asked you to join? And how many of you serve on a board because it is work related? Both scenarios are more common than you would think and often result in the board member attending the meetings and functions out of obligation rather than actual desire. If you don't understand the role of the organization in the community or if their mission is not one of your top three passions; you really shouldn't serve on its board. Although, if you do understand the role and you are passionate about their mission, then you will be instrumental in helping the nonprofit organization achieve great success.

One of my personal misconceptions was, if you had the time to be a board member, then that was all you needed. However, if you are truly passionate about something, you'll make the time to be a part of it. Being a part of it means learning about the organization and how its success is measured. Finding out the terms of office and how many board meetings are there in a year and how long each one lasts. Plus, asking the organization what is expected of its board members. An item on the top ten list of basic responsibilities, or expectations, is recruiting and orienting new board members.

Recruiting new board members is tough. It's especially tough if the mission isn't clear to the board or if the nonprofit doesn't have a "30 second elevator speech" for their members to learn and understand. Once this is accomplished, it becomes much easier to talk to potential recruits and say "join me in supporting this organization". In other words, "I support it and stand behind its mission and I think you should too." Now, supporting an organization doesn't necessarily

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mean you need to serve a few terms on its board of directors; but you can certainly invest in its efforts by providing financial support.

For example, Greene County Economic Development Corporation is a public/private nonprofit organization; we receive monies from the county and we have investors. The money from the county covers our operational costs while the private funds help us with our many projects. Supporting an organization can be a combo of three factors: time, talents and treasures (funding). Time and talent are usually devoted to your work and your passions.

I've mentioned the word 'passion' a few times throughout this article; I like to also call it 'hot buttons'. What are you passionate about? What are your hot buttons? GCEDC is working on multiple and varied projects that are important to the community and you might find one or more that hit your 'hot buttons'. Why don't you give us a call and let's talk about it.

*Brianne Perigo is the administrative assistant at Greene County Economic Development Corporation and can be reached at (812) 847-4500 or [bperigo@gcedc.us](mailto:bperigo@gcedc.us)*