

# Nonprofits fill many vital roles

By: Pauline Schneider

Have you hugged a non-profit lately? My hunch is that many residents of Los Alamos benefit greatly from a number of non-profit organizations locally and may be unaware of the degree to which these entities contribute to life in Los Alamos. Non-profits are behind much of the local arts scene, environmental activities, social services for all ages and a number of other niches not always filled by the for-profit sector. However, when you ask non-profits what they do well, they are generally very modest and quick to see the many areas in which they could improve. As the director of a local non-profit, I've sometimes felt that the emphasis of our local economic development efforts have only been on for profit businesses. Let's not forget, that non-profits are a source of employment, providers of services and we also attract outsiders to the community for events that will involve spending and gross receipts generated for Los Alamos.

At present, there are about 40 local non-profit businesses and organizations that are members of the Los Alamos Chamber of Commerce. This past year, the Chamber has started to reach out to this group of service providers specifically to learn their issues related to doing business in this area. There is hope that the Chamber can not only help non-profit businesses network with each other, but the Chamber can also offer training and business support to meet the sometimes unique needs experienced by non-profit entities. A survey completed as a part of this outreach to non-profits looked at organizational success and performance as well as training interests. The majority of organizations saw themselves as performing only moderately well when it came to marketing what they do. From personal experience in the non-profit for whom I work, Los Alamos Retired & Senior Organization, I know that some funding sources do not permit their dollars to be used for marketing. A second area that these non-profits rated as key to their success, but perhaps not performing well at presently was business planning and operating like a business. Many non-profits are formed around a cause – by people with a vision, but perhaps with not enough business sense. The two topics that were most requested for training by local organizations were fundraising and marketing. These organizations need help in knowing how to best sell what they do in order to attract donors and clients. The Small Business Development Center can be an excellent resource for non-profits wanting to improve in these areas, and the networking facilitated by the Chamber can also bring together organizations that can share valuable information.

A collaborative which gathers most of our local health-related non-profits together on a monthly basis is the Community Health Council. A recent survey of non-profit Community Health Council (CHC) members showed three consistent challenges for the organizations who participated: 1. Employee recruitment/retention 2. Funding 3. Employee healthcare coverage. Obtaining good workers and providing them with benefits may have nothing to do with the actual service provided by an organization, but it is a vital part of being a good business. Perhaps by more extensive networking, local non-profits could find ways to share employees, pool healthcare costs, or swap services

that their employees could use. The Community Health Council has already successfully brought together organizations to apply for grant money which has resulted in increased services to our community. There is regular Chamber representation at the CHC, so the concerns of these non-profits are readily heard.

At the LACDC, we want a thriving business community made up of both for profit and non-profit businesses. Each type of business can contribute significantly to the community's needs and can also learn from each other. I want to encourage those local non-profits who do not currently belong to the Chamber to join and benefit from this membership by making the business aspect of your organization even better. To those current non-profit members, I encourage you to participate in the opportunities that are available to our organizations, let your issues be known and be a vital part of our business community.