

From today's young professionals to tomorrow's leaders

Business and community leaders are realizing that young professionals are the future of our community. They are taking a look at how to attract and retain young professionals in our area. One way to do that is through young professionals or young leaders groups.

The United Way started an organization called the Young Leaders Society about three years ago. It began as a way of providing young professionals in their 20s, 30s and 40s with opportunities to become involved in their community.

"A small group of seven individuals realized that there was not much opportunity for young leaders to get together with philanthropy in mind," said Gail Greager of the United Way. "So, they teamed with United Way and started the Young Leaders Society, which has grown to more than 160 members today."

The Young Leaders Society partic-



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ipates in five to seven volunteer opportunities each year in addition to planned social events.

Greager said that while they don't keep age-specific statistics on those that are involved with the United Way, it is pretty obvious that there was a need to bring young professionals together, especially when you see how the group has grown in just a few short years.

"The Young Leaders' Society has been a great resource for prospective board members and volunteers for United Way events," Greager said. "The group is very active, vibrant and definitely engaged."

Other United Ways throughout the country have also started chapters of Young Leaders Society and have used the Tri-Cities group as an example of what to do.

More recently, the city of Richland has also gotten into the game. They asked intern Tara Kious to develop a young professionals group for the Tri-Cities that would provide networking and social activities to keep young professionals involved in the business and public realms of the community.

"Gary (Ballew, Business and Economic Development Manager for Richland) mentioned that it was in Richland's strategic plan to attract more young professionals to the Tri-Cities," Kious said. "So I began to research what a group for young professionals might look like."

Kious has been working with the United Way in developing her group. She wants to complement what they

have already done for the community service sector and create something with more of a business networking and public involvement feel.

A focus group consisting of six people from different business sectors throughout the Tri-Cities has met three times to discuss possibilities for the new group. A survey has been completed by 175 people ranging in age from 21 to 35 and an event was held at Marples restaurant for about 40 young professionals.

Preliminary feedback from participants shows that young professionals are looking for more social outlets that are within walking distance, much like a downtown Spokane or Seattle where you could stop in for a bite to eat then walk down the street and listen to some jazz music or go shopping.

While that can't happen overnight, the information is something for city planners to keep in mind.

It is important for local businesses and organizations to find ways to appeal to these groups as young professionals provide the skilled workforce needed to sustain our economic development, and they have discretionary spending that benefits the local economy.

According to Greager, "We want the younger generations to want to stay here, love the area and see the potential in the Tri-Cities. With groups like the Young Leaders Society, we're starting to see that happen."

For more information on the Young Leaders Society, contact Sarah Murphy at 509-783-4102 or the new young professionals group, contact Tara Kious at 509-205-9957.

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