

LaSalle's Nonprofit Center celebrates 30

Premium content from Philadelphia Business Journal - by Peter Key , Staff Writer

January 21, 2011



When ESPN turned 30 in 2009, it celebrated by airing 30 documentaries by 30 different film-makers on 30 moments in sports that occurred during its first 30 years on the air.

The Nonprofit Center at La Salle University's School of Business doesn't quite have the budget for that type of extravaganza, so it's celebrating its 30th anniversary by offering free and reduced-rate services to its constituents, which are nonprofit organizations in southeastern Pennsylvania, Central and South Jersey and northern Delaware.

"We're coming up with all kinds of things around the number 30 and many of them will be on a first-come, first-served basis," said Laura Otten, who has been the center's executive director since 2001.

The initial one allows 30 nonprofits to have free 30-minute conversations with the center about their consulting needs. Others that the center will roll out later include 30 free admissions to its classes, 30 extra days of membership and \$30 off job postings on its website.

"It's all to really expose people to the kinds of opportunities that we've been offering for 30 years and to celebrate the sector and to celebrate our birthday," Otten said.

The center got its start in 1981 as a series of management training programs funded by the William Penn Foundation and led by Everett Frank Jr., who retired from the Scott Paper Co. after 26 years to become the first executive in residence at La Salle's business school.

"It was just sort of piloted for the first few years and then it was clear there was the need for some sort of a center to help nonprofit managers," said Karen Simmons, the president and CEO of the Chester County Community Foundation.

La Salle officially founded the center in 1986 and Simmons joined it as an assistant director the next year. In 1990, she succeeded Frank as executive director, a job she left for her current post in 2001.

As executive director, Simmons was charged with expanding the center beyond its initial focus. Under her, it began offering workshops and consulting services and launched a jobs newsletter that the center has converted to a website.

Although they're approximate, the statistics on the number of people and organizations served by the center are impressive.

Otten estimates it has taught more than 50,000 nonprofit staffers and leaders and 6,000 nonprofit board members with 1,500 to 1,700 people taking classes each year. It has provided consulting services to 5,000 nonprofits and helped fill from 6,000 to 10,000 jobs, she said.

One statistic she doesn't have is the number of phone inquiries about anything and everything related to the nonprofit world it has fielded over the years, but she knows it's a lot.

"We really have become that hub, that one-stop shop for nonprofits," she said.

The center is not unique. Most major metropolitan areas have similar organizations, or programs that serve a similar role, said Andrew R. Swinney, president of the Philadelphia Foundation.

"I think the fact that we've had it for 30 years is indicative of the importance of the nonprofit sector in the community as a whole and obviously the fact that it has lasted 30 years must mean it has some benefit to the nonprofit sector and the community at large or it wouldn't have lasted," Swinney said.

The center's longevity is also a tribute to the Order of the Christian Brothers, a teaching order of the Roman Catholic Church, which founded and operates La Salle, Simmons said.

"They could have chopped that program years ago and instead they've really tried to support it and make it a source of pride," she said.
