

Nonprofits expect surge of departures

BY PATTY TASCARELLA
AND TIM SCHOOLEY

Three out of four nonprofit executives plan to leave their jobs within the next five years, according to a recent national study of nonprofit leadership.

The study, conducted by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, a San Francisco-based consultancy, and the Meyer Foundation, Washington, D.C., pointed to high rates of burnout, grumbling about lesser pay and low levels of succession planning in a sector facing a generational changing of the guard without enough reinforcements.

Breakout data for the Pittsburgh region was unavailable, but local nonprofit professionals said nonprofit organizations here already are struggling with staff departures and pending retirements. And they expect it to get worse.

"It's just a steady trickle right now," said Peggy Outon, executive director of the Bayer Center for Nonprofit Management at Robert Morris University. "I hear about somebody else who is planning to retire pretty much every week."

John Thornburgh, a Downtown-based vice president with Oak Brook, Ill.-based recruitment firm Witt/Kieffer, which specializes in nonprofits, anticipates "continued churn" for multiple reasons.

"It's tougher and tougher to run a nonprofit these days," Thornburgh said. "The finances are getting squeezed; everyone's chasing the same funding sources, and boards are taking a more active and proper role in their oversight of these organizations and their executives."

Some are leaving for the private sector.

Gerry Balbier, a former senior program officer at the Heinz Endowments, joined Apangea Learning Inc., a provider of individualized educational services, as vice president of innovative programs, last month.

"There's something to be said for getting a variety of experience," Balbier said. "Working at Apangea gets me closer to schools and assessments of student achievement, and I'm not reluctant to say these are skills I want to acquire."

But much of the local turnover is executives moving to other nonprofits.

Gregg Behr, former president of the Forbes Funds, became executive director of the Grable Foundation last year. He was replaced by Diana Bucco, a founder of the Coro Center for Civic Leadership and The Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

"I am that executive with the average tenure of five years," Bucco said. "It's indicative of changes in general in the work force. Twenty years ago, people went into a job and stayed for life."

Behr, who served on an advisory committee for the CompassPoint/Meyer Foundation study, said Pittsburgh may not move as quickly as nonprofits elsewhere. A Forbes Funds-commissioned study in 2003 revealed Pittsburgh nonprofit executives expected to stay in their current positions for longer periods than the national average and more than one-third expected to retire at their current jobs.

Several chiefs of Pittsburgh's largest foundations are 60 or old-



JOE WOJCIK

Gerry Balbier is part of a wave of executives leaving nonprofits, having left the Heinz Endowments for Apangea Learning last month.

er — including Henry Beukema, McCune Foundation; William Trueheart, Pittsburgh Foundation; Max King, Heinz Endowments; and William Getty, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation — though none has given any indication of passing the baton.

And a 60th birthday does not mean retirement is imminent, especially in Pittsburgh, where corporate retirees sometimes find second careers at nonprofits.

Kate Dewey, 60, principal of

nonprofit consultancy Dewey & Kaye, part of McCrory & McDowell LLC, Downtown, said she believes Pittsburgh's nonprofit community suffers from "an absence of next generation talent."

"After our generation," Dewey said, "many people didn't choose to go into nonprofit work. So there's a real leadership void in terms of a pipeline of successors."

ptascarella@bizjournals.com | (412) 208-3832
tschooley@bizjournals.com | (412) 208-3826