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Registry links companies with women leaders

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Gaelyn Derr found herself in a difficult spot.

The executive director of the nonprofit Therapy Animals of Utah needed to fill some board vacancies, and she hoped for a little gender and occupational diversity.

Her organization's board at the time had only four members — not enough for a quorum. All the board members were men, and two were lawyers.

But finding the right board member — one with the right qualifications who also fits in with an organization's culture and mission — can be tricky.

"We wanted a mix of men and women on the board, and we wanted someone with banking experience if possible," she said.

Derr turned to the Women Leaders Utah registry, a database of about 260 women business leaders who are available to manage, lead and serve as board members for public, private and nonprofit companies and organizations. Salt Lake Community College recently took over management of the registry in an effort to help develop it as a community resource.

Derr found several candidates on the registry's website, www.womenleadersutah.org. One referred her to Monica Williams, a vice president at Zions Bank. Not only was she a woman banker, she also loves animals and was willing to go through the nonprofit's training to volunteer with her own dog, Max, a schnauzer mix who also was an ideal candidate for the animal therapy.

Derr couldn't believe her luck. "It worked out just fabulous for us," she said.

Created about a year ago, the registry is designed to help link women professionals with organizations of all sizes and types.

"The registry was created because there wasn't good board representation by women," said Danielle Lower,



Jim Urquhart | The Salt Lake Tribune Monica Williams and her therapy dog Max Wednesday, July 14, 2010 at Atria Sandy Retirement Community in Sandy. The nonprofit Therapy Animals of Utah was looking for a board member and found Monica Williams, who works for Zions Bank. She's not only a board member but she volunteers with her dog to bring comfort to people who need it.. 7/14/10

director of the SLCC's Women's Business Institute.

But the registry struggled to gain hold as a community resource due to a lack of money and paid staff to develop and market it. Volunteers already busy with other community efforts maintained it.

Today, the registry is maintained by the staff working at the Women's Business Institute and the well-known Miller Business Resource Center, which has a number of programs that aim to help women in business, such as the Banking on Women initiative, in partnership with GE Capital Management. Banking on Women provides small loans — microloans — to help women develop their own businesses.

Lower said the registry's mission has expanded to include not only women qualified and interesting in serving on boards, but those who can serve as speakers, volunteers and even as employees.

Deborah Bayle, president and chief executive of United Way of Salt Lake, said the registry also can help companies find consultants.

Bayle said she plans to use the registry as an ongoing resource to look for women board candidates. She said she'd like to expand the number of women on United Way's board. Right now, just under 40 percent of the 50 board members are women.

"There are so many talented women in our community," she said. "When you look at the experience of people in the registry, there's just so much they have to offer."

The hope is that the registry will grow in the coming years from the current 260 members to several thousand and that it will become a well-utilized resource for many of Utah companies and organizations, said Alicia Bremer, a public relations executive who has volunteered over the past year to develop the registry.

Too often, she says, companies tap the same women professionals, who end up serving on multiple boards. They simply don't know where to find fresh talent interested in board positions and other professional opportunities, she said.

Monica Williams of Zions Bank said she couldn't be happier with her board position. She never envisioned serving on a board of a company that gives her the opportunity to lend her financial knowledge while also tapping her love of animals.

"I love it," she said. "I never dreamed I'd find a board I could be so committed to. It's my passion."

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Women Leaders Utah Registry

O Looking for a woman business professional? Interested in being part of a registry of women business professionals? Go to www.womenleadersutah.org for more information.