

# Want to serve on boards, but don't know how?

New course for nonprofit volunteers should ease recent anxieties about responsibilities and liabilities

Confidence in St. Cloud nonprofit and independent agency boards was shaken this year when several found themselves facing serious financial and legal troubles they hadn't seen coming.

Many pillars of the community, known personally or by reputation throughout the area, distanced themselves from or abandoned organizations to which they had devoted considerable time, talent and trust. This, in effect, jeopardized services to our most vulnerable community members.

Some vowed never to serve on another board. Many said they wished they had known more about what signaled trouble ahead.

We need these volunteers and others like them to serve

We need these volunteers and others like them to serve on boards of organizations that fill essential community needs. That means rebuilding confidence.

The Central Minnesota Community Foundation understands the potentially disastrous consequences for our community if people fear serving on boards. Rather than sit by and watch as good people give up civic responsibilities, the foundation is giving people a positive option: basic training.

Every person who has wanted to serve on a board but has felt uneasy about it and every organization that has a volunteer board of directors should attend the foundation's new course called "BoardSmart."

The time commitment is nine hours in three three-hour sessions. Spending the time now could save time later if you have to straighten out problems because of a lack of understanding or knowledge.

Service on a board is not just an honorary title where the work can be left to someone else. Volunteer board members are the watchdogs of their organizations, the last check against mismanagement.

People usually don't need any special expertise to serve on boards. However, they need to know the basics of liability, insurance and audits; proper board and staff leadership roles; information needed to make decisions; how to develop a budget; how to set goals and evaluate progress.

The Community Foundation's course covers all that and more, well worth the time and the \$25 cost per session. When volunteers understand and accept their responsibilities, board oversight works and can prevent many of the serious and sudden misfortunes we've seen this last year.

St. Cloud has many people who would be fine board members, including many among the field of City Council and school board candidates — not all of whom will win the offices they seek. The "BoardSmart" course can go far to rebuild self-confidence among potential volunteers as well as the integrity and accountability of our vital nonprofit organizations.

Service on a board provides opportunities for individuals to solve community problems in creative ways, gain leadership experience for other community roles and make friends among active, interesting people.

Those who go into board service understanding their responsibilities can avoid unsuspected difficulties, relax and enjoy giving of themselves.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

*The deadline for registration is Oct. 8. Each three-hour session costs \$25, and participation is limited. Brochures and registration are available at the Central Minnesota Community Foundation. Call 253-4380 for more information.*