

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Pfizer job cuts also hurt boards of nonprofits

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ANN ARBOR -- The ripple effect of Pfizer's closure through the local nonprofit community is about more than just dollars and cents.

Employees and the company itself have been strong donors to area charities, which are bracing for the financial loss when Pfizer closes its Ann Arbor operations by the end of next year.

But those nonprofits also expect to be affected in another way -- the loss of a dozen or more strong board members, said Diana Kern, director of BoardConnect at Nonprofit Enterprise for Work.

Kern said the board vacancies are likely to result from Pfizer employees who leave the area to take jobs elsewhere.

That's troubling news to nonprofits already struggling to attract and retain board members.

Phil D'Anieri, program director for the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, said it's already a constant challenge to find the right people to serve on nonprofit boards -- a challenge now made tougher by the state's economy.

For example, Michigan Ability Partners needs six new board members for what is supposed to be a 15-member board of directors, said Susan Hornfeld, CEO of the nonprofit.

Hornfeld uses BoardConnect and BoardNet programs at NEW Center to find potential board members. Those programs train prospective board members on how to serve and how boards function -- and they even offer a computerized matching service that couples the skills of potential members with the right boards.

Most boards like hers, Hornfeld said, need members with Internet, public relations, financial and fundraising skills. Beyond that, it's important for new board members to understand the role of board service has changed. Hornfeld said.

"It's not like it used to be, where you just meet great people and do good things for community. That was the old way," Hornfeld said. "Now most nonprofits are struggling, and they need a working board. If you commit to serving on a board, it's going to be a significant commitment, as opposed to a one hour meeting every month or quarter."