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Club Management Services handles organizations' administrative tasks

by Maria Hoover
NO COMMENTS

Jean Harmison's business, Club Management Services LLC, began in 1997 because of a need she saw firsthand as a volunteer with Junior League of Springfield.

"I sat on so many different boards, and I realized ... if a board member doesn't do their job in one area, it really kind of falls apart," Harmison said. "You almost need that consistent person that everybody can fall back on to make sure everything gets done."

Harmison serves as the point of contact for 12 client organizations, handling their phone calls via three phone lines at her office, 1717 E. Republic Road, where she moved in January after 10 years of operating the business – sans employees – out of her home.

Through Club Management Services, Harmison provides comprehensive administration for clubs and associations with help from two staff members and a Web designer. Primarily, she serves organizations that either choose not to, or can't afford, to hire someone to take care of necessary tasks such as mailings, newsletters, Web site maintenance and event planning, including handling registration payments and menu details.

"I have the building. I already have the copy machine, the phone system and the computer system," Harmison said. "We attend meetings (and) do all the finances, but I never sign a check. That's one of my rules."

Harmison's fees range from \$300 to \$4,000 a month, depending on membership numbers and which tasks are performed.


"I negotiate a monthly fee and (clients) use me as much as (they) want," Harmison said. "If it gets out of control, we'll talk later, but it's never gotten to that point."


Harmison started small with just one organization, Sunrise Rotary, and she credits financial consultant John Piatchek of Piatchek and Associates with helping to launch her business. Piatchek was president of Sunrise Rotary when the group hired Harmison, and he also put her in touch with leaders of several other groups.


"Before we knew it ... she went from one club to about five or six," Piatchek said. "She ... did what she said she was going to do ... and did it well."





Jean Harmison manages 12 organizations through her company, Club Management Services LLC. Her office has a conference room with presentation capabilities for use by her clients.


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Piatchek said Harmison is instrumental in easing the transition that comes with electing new board members every year, a common practice for clubs and associations.

“There’s a lot of work that goes on ... trying to run the finances and the meetings and making sure everything happens,” he said.

Harmison’s dozen clients include the 600-member Missouri Municipal and Associate Circuit Judges Association. But Harmison said it was the addition of the Greater Springfield Dental Society in 2006 that convinced her it was time to leave her home office behind and hire help.

Originally, the group contracted with Harmison to provide administrative services while they looked for an executive director. After about six months, however, members decided to hire Harmison long-term to fill the executive director’s role.

“We didn’t feel like we needed a person full-time, per se, but we wanted our phones manned, and we wanted a professional to handle our executive directorship, and Jean was the perfect person for it,” said Dr. Kelly Barnett, past president of the Greater Springfield Dental Society. “I knew Jean personally and professionally, and at the time, it just kind of evolved into (whether) this could fit into her parameters and (ours).”

Barnett said it didn’t hurt, either, that many dentists already knew Harmison through her work with other organizations.

“Her professionalism and organization skills were already highly regarded ... so that once we came up with her job description and what we needed her to do for our organization, it was just a really good fit.” Barnett said. “She’s got us all organized.”

While Harmison personally does some volunteer work – including serving at her children’s schools and as chairwoman of a Muscular Dystrophy Association 50th anniversary event coming up in October – she doesn’t join the organizations she works with professionally.

“That’s kind of a conflict in my mind,” she said.

While Harmison has focused on nonprofit clubs and associations, she’s keeping an open mind about applying her services to small businesses.

“I’m open to anything that needs any kind of management,” she said. “You’ve got to keep changing and moving to whatever the industry needs, so I’m not going to limit myself.”

Within the next five years, Harmison would like to franchise her business, but finding the right person will be the key.

“They’d have to have a lot of energy and a lot of drive on their own,” she said.