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Pittsburgh nonprofits renew focus on development posts

Fundraising comes back

Pittsburgh Business Times - by [Patty Tascarella](#)

In the midst of developing around 13 miles of the riverfront park loop around Pittsburgh, **Riverlife** Executive Director Lisa Schroeder knew she would need to find ways of raising money when the nonprofit's development director left in late 2009 to start his own company.

The post had to be filled.

And so Riverlife — a public-private partnership to reclaim, restore and promote Pittsburgh's riverfronts — joined a growing number of local nonprofits to go searching for development directors.

In July, Riverlife turned to Sean Brady, who wasn't looking to leave Venture Outdoors, where he worked for nine years. But once he was approached about the opening, "it drew me out of a job I very much loved," Brady said.

The development director position was often cut during the recession as cash-strapped organizations took severe cost-slashing measures. But with government support tighter, many are now looking for seasoned professionals to lead the fundraising charge.

At Riverlife, one of Brady's primary roles will be to raise money for the nonprofit, which he described as "continually in one or another capital campaign." Currently under way are efforts to develop the South Shore Riverfront Park, the Convention Center Park and, biggest of all, Point State Park. Riverlife has \$300,000 to go to reach the \$5 million goal for rebuilding the fountain at Point State Park.

"Even though it was pressing to have someone on board quickly to oversee development activities, we saw it as a major investment to take the time we needed to find the person with the experience and with a passionate commitment to our mission," Schroeder said.

John Thornburgh, executive vice president and director of the higher education practice at nonprofit recruitment firm Witt/Kieffer, said his company has seen a "steady flow of national searches" in its key areas of higher education and health care.

"We see no sign that's going to abate," Thornburgh said. "The recognition is that philanthropy is playing a more critical role in the success of many organizations and as dollars have become tighter in the community and among donors, you need to have the top-flight people and development organization to tap into those dollars."

Still, that doesn't mean a wave of fundraising campaigns — traditionally led by development directors — will engulf the region, at least in terms of the size and scope seen in the past. Campaigns these days are mostly small, aimed at basic needs, and because experienced talent is in short supply, nonprofits already are trying to snare development directors from each other.

Kate Dewey, principal of Downtown-based nonprofit consultants **Dewey & Kaye**, a **McCrorry & McDowell** company, said funding cuts in the Pennsylvania state budget are pushing "the need to diversify revenue" at nonprofits.

"With recent negotiations and announcements that projections (on state funding for nonprofits) for next year and the year after that won't increase, it's likely there will be even more aggressive activity by nonprofits who traditionally rely on state revenue in the search for development talent," she said.

Dewey's business is up from a year ago, and though she wouldn't provide specific figures, Dewey & Kaye is conducting at least a dozen searches, according to its website, for a smattering of educational organizations, including **Junior Achievement of Western Pennsylvania** and the **Carnegie Museum of Art**.

Robert Teeter, president of Greensburg-based **Teeter Associates**, also is doing more searches for development directors.

"Part of it's driven by nonprofits that are stressed on the budget side paying more attention to development than before," he said. "If their budget wasn't really crunched, they would get by with an adequate development program or a few people doing it on the side. Now they're saying this has to be an important part of our budget or we won't be able to provide the same level of services, or grow."

Posts aren't easy to fill. Development departments were an early casualty of the recession, and internally nurtured talent is in short supply.

"The reality is, there's not a very deep bench of talent in the advancement field," Thornburgh said.

Moreover, nonprofits want "a relatively seasoned and sophisticated person, not someone new into the career," Dewey said. They're looking for development directors "with established networks of contacts" who understand the complicated process of finding new



Joe Wojcik

Riverlife's director of development, Sean Brady, sits in the water steps near PNC Park on the North Side. He joined the nonprofit in July.

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revenue streams and are able to operate strategically in the current economic environment.

"I think you'll see much more activity in terms of trying to cherry pick people in organizations who have a good reputation and a track record, enticing them to accept a different opportunity," she said.

Junior Achievement started its search this month after former development director Michael Jopinko left for a job in the for-profit sector, said Sara Caldwell, director of marketing and communications. It's crucial to fill the post quickly: JA's annual fundraising campaign kicks off in early fall. This year's goal hasn't been set, but last year's was \$500,000.

"We're looking for someone who's well-connected in the community, someone who's not afraid to wheel and deal, kind of as the face of JA, securing grants and expanding our profile," Caldwell said.

Dewey believes nonprofits for the most part aren't gearing for capital campaigns. But Teeter has not only seen momentum build over the past six months, his firm is working on 21 fundraising efforts, "the most we've ever had at one time," and is in talks with five more organizations.

Most are looking for fairly small amounts, around \$2 million. Clients include NEED, an education nonprofit looking to raise \$7.5 million over three years; and the **Westmoreland Cultural Trust**, which needs \$2 million to renovate the **Palace Theatre** in Greensburg.

"What happened is, two years ago, people hit the wall, backed up, didn't think the money was there and thought it was the worst time to go ahead with a campaign," Teeter said. "That's easing up. Their need is so pent-up to meet basic operating costs or offer more services, not for new buildings."

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