

Not-for-profit tech resource gearing up

NPower Indiana wins approval, hires CEO

By Andrea Muirragui Davis
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David A. Lewis will drive Central Indiana Community Foundation's effort to help area not-for-profits get up to speed on the information superhighway.

Lewis, former president and publisher of Topics Newspapers in Fishers, was hired last week as CEO of NPower Indiana, a CICF subsidiary that will provide information technology expertise to other not-for-profits.

Indianapolis is one of six cities in the United States to win an NPower franchise, a partnership with Microsoft Corp. Microsoft will contribute free software and \$750,000 over three years, and The Indianapolis Foundation will match up to \$100,000 in other contributions.

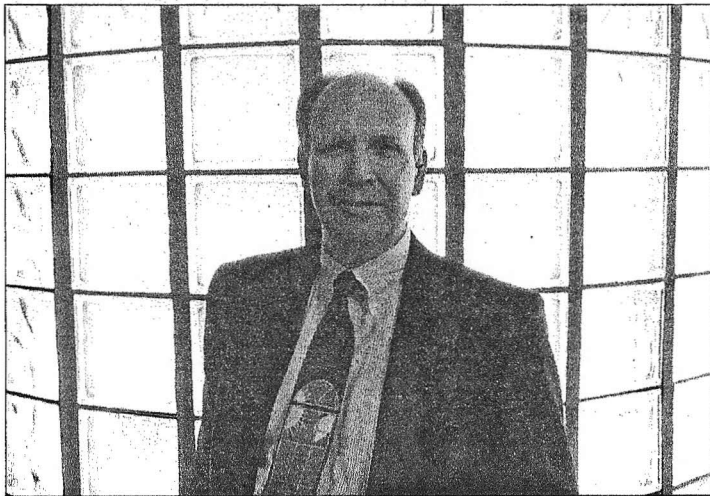
NPower Indiana's architects hope to start the program in late March, after filling out the seven-person staff. Lewis, who volunteered for a variety of charitable organizations during his 28-year newspaper career, was the first hire.

"We're trained to work with people, not computers. As a result, we're not always astute when it comes to technology."

James Taylor, John H. Boner Community Center executive director

"If we had the staff hired and the location ready, we'd start next week," said Lewis, who assumes his NPower duties Jan. 2. "In a couple of months, that'll all be done."

In addition to finding a staff, he and the NPower board want to take their time figuring out what to tackle first. Liking the launch to a restaurant grand opening, Lewis said it's important to figure out



IBJ Photo/Robin Jerstad

David A. Lewis has been hired as executive director of NPower Indiana, a technology resource for area not-for-profit organizations.

how much the group will be able to handle at once.

"You don't want to serve people cold potatoes," he said.

"We have to figure out how many we can do at the same time and not be spread too thin."

While many details are still being worked out, the basics of the plan are in place. NPower will be a membership organization, offering IT advice and resources to charitable organizations in return for annual dues of \$50-\$450 based on the group's size. Groups would pay for some services on a sliding scale.

"We will benchmark where they are, then move them up the ladder of IT knowledge," said Tony Macklin, CICF's director of community initiatives. "A big component of that is training. Most not-for-profit staffs are still fairly untrained when it comes to IT skills."

NPower Indiana also will have business partners, who will provide products and services at substantial discounts, Macklin said.

"In Indianapolis, we're very oriented toward public-private partnerships," he said, "and the Indianapolis IT business community wanted to be part of helping not-for-profits."

In its first year, NPower aims to provide some level of service to 7 percent to 10 percent of the roughly 2,300 not-for-

profits in Marion and Hamilton counties. Lewis expects to help mostly small to midsize groups next year.

"A vast majority of those organizations don't have technology plans," he said. "We'll help them figure out what they have, where they need to go and how to get there."

Community Centers of Indianapolis would like to be among the guinea pigs, said James Taylor, a member of CCI's technology committee and executive director of the John H. Boner Community Center. CCI provides some administrative functions and a unified voice for 12 community centers in the city.

The independent centers serve similar functions in their communities, but they are on their own technologically. Some of the centers still keep records with pen and paper, while others use computers. Getting everyone onto the same page—then automating the case-management system—would make the centers more efficient, Taylor said.

"We are social workers. We're trained to work with people, not computers," he said. "As a result, we're not always astute when it comes to technology."

Taylor said CCI could benefit from NPower's taking an inventory of the centers, then drafting a technology plan for the group. He thinks the group also may look to NPower for training and troubleshooting.

But Taylor is most excited about NPower's role as an unbiased adviser, saying not-for-profits often worry that their technological naiveté makes them vulnerable to unscrupulous vendors.

"If we talk to a company that makes hammers and screwdrivers, you can bet they're going to tell us we need hammers and screwdrivers," he said. "But if we talk to NPower, they'll tell us about the hammers, screwdrivers, wrenches, pliers and all the other tools out there. They aren't trying to sell us anything."

That objectivity is important, Macklin said. In fact, NPower partners must agree to participate in an open evaluation process, where not-for-profits and vendors alike will share information about how the relationships worked, possibly on a Web site.

Rick Nicolini tells everyone he talks to about the NPower initiative. And as chief information officer of United Way of Central Indiana, he talks to a lot of IT professionals. "No one leaves a conversation without getting Tony Macklin's name and number," he said.

"Competition is good," Nicolini said. "The more vendors that get involved in the NPower consortium, the better for non-profits."

Even the United Way—among the larger charitable organizations in central Indiana—will be able to benefit from NPower, he said.

"We have needs," he said.

NPower is working with the Indiana Information Technology Association Foundation to recruit and deploy volunteers, Macklin said. The INITA Foundation also will share space in the CICF building in Broad Ripple where NPower will be headquartered.

With funding from Microsoft and in-kind support from CICF, NPower has about half of its \$1 million annual budget. The group also will seek donations—up to \$100,000 of which will be matched by The Indianapolis Foundation, a partner in CICF with The Legacy Fund of Hamilton County—and will collect the membership and consulting fees from not-for-profits.

Many other specifics remain to be determined.

"If it seems like some of this is going to be by the seat of our pants, it's because it is," Lewis said. "There are so many different ways we can go. Our challenge is to pick the most effective way."

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