



## **SCORE column: Nonprofit status requires work, time**

Last week's column highlighted the complexities of filing for tax-exempt status. Despite those challenges, Ruth Fett, owner of Parent Team, thinks that her business will be best served by doing the extra work necessary to become a nonprofit entity.

About three years ago, Fett started Parent Team as a for-profit business.

"I was a school counselor and felt frustrated by the lack of concrete information available to parents," she said. "I knew there had to be a better way, and gave up the benefits and security of employment for the world of entrepreneurship."

Fett prepared by attending Urban Hope Entrepreneurship Center (now E-Hub) and learned how to write a business plan. Although she has a master's degree in counseling, she decided to focus on coaching.

"Counselors look backward and help process events of the past. That's not my role. If you are a parent and want to get unstuck and move ahead at a good speed, come work with me. What a coach does for a team, I do by giving parents everything they need to win," Fett said.

She felt that her business was progressing well, but began to see a gap in the people she could serve. There were those who were referred by Family Services, and there were those who could afford the cost. But she was frequently getting calls from parents who needed her help but couldn't pay the fees.

After talking to SCORE counselors and administrators of other nonprofit organizations, Fett came to the conclusion that the business would be able to help more parents if it were nonprofit and could obtain grants and donations.

"I see it growing substantially to be able to serve the amount of people who could use help," she said. "I can go after grants to assist people with fees and set up a program for parent education offerings within schools."

Although the change means that Fett will be starting from the beginning and rebuilding the business in a different fashion, she is convinced that it is the way to go. Since she is required to have a Board of Directors, she is in the process of filling those volunteer positions.

The people she has asked to serve are passionate about parenting and are strong family advocates.

"Right now, we're talking about resource developments," Fett said. "We're tweaking the bylaws, working on the business plan and developing focus groups to find out what services families in the area would like to see offered."

During this phase, meetings are held once a month; later, it will depend on need.

Fett, a single mother of five, says that her income may be limited by being tax-exempt, but the mission is more important to her than money.

"The important thing to me is to make a difference," she said. "When I die, I want my gravestone to say, 'She made the world a little better.'"

**Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and assistant district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.**