Academic dean's other job is to help needy families

This summer, meet some of the people who will shape our community's future

By Chyrl Hill Lander

SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Brent Chrite, associate dean of the Eller College of Management at the University of Arizona, rubs shoulders with people operating on both ends of the economic spectrum — those who are highly successful business owners and entrepreneurs, as well as those who struggle to pay monthly electric bills.

As associate dean, Chrite prepares students and professionals for success in business. In this capacity, he shares his expertise with approximately 600 graduate students and professionals who are accepted to Eller's Masters in Business Administration programs.

As chairman of the Board of Directors of the Tucson Urban League, 2305 S. Park Ave., Chrite sets policies to guide league staff in their delivery of services and programs to low- and moderate-income families in Tucson.

Prior to coming to the Eller College, Chrite, 48, was the assistant dean for global programs at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business in Ann Arbor. He earned a doctorate from Michigan, where his dissertation was titled "Knowledge Management and the Impact on Human Capital Development and Organizational Development."

In 2003, he and his wife Phyllis and three children — Elrie, now 19, Adriana, 16, and Jordan, 10 — traded the snow and ice of Michigan for Tucson's 350 days of sunshine.

In addition to being associate dean, Chrite directs the four MBA programs in the Eller College: the traditional two-year program for full-time students; an 18-month evening program for working professionals; the 14-month executive program for senior-level managers that convenes every other Friday and Saturday in Scottsdale; and a new one-year accelerated program for students with undergraduate business degrees that will begin in 2010.

From his office in McClelland Hall at the UA, Chrite talked about his volunteer work with the Urban League, whose mission is to help people with financial needs become economically self-reliant. He has been on the board of the league for five years. He assumed the chairman's seat in January.

The league, which has an annual budget approaching $7 million, has a staff of approximately 75 to run its various programs, which include child-care centers; after-school activities; job training and job referral and placement; homebuyer education training; renter assistance counseling; and housing development to increase Tucson's supply of decent, safe, affordable housing.

"When I walk through the lobby of the Tucson Urban League, it is crowded with families, with kids, who need help. The work that it does is vital and the need is at a peak right now," said Chrite.

We are asking Tucsonans to shine some light on emerging local leaders. Please tell us if you know a Tucsonan — young, old or somewhere in between — who is beginning to come into focus as someone who will alter Southern Arizona's future.

We use "Tucsonan" in the broadest regional sense. It may be someone in Vail, Marana, Green Valley or Oro Valley.

Perhaps it is a retired person who is pouring his talents into a nonprofit charity. Perhaps is it a scholar or scientist whose work you believe will touch our lives.

We'll be publishing profiles of the people who will shape Tucson's tomorrow on Sundays through the summer. All will be written by Tucsonans who know them and recognize their potential contributions.

Send an e-mail to Jane See White (jwhite@azstarnet.com) if you'd like to write a short, 500-word essay about a person you believe will be influential in our region's future. Tell us how they're special. Let us know a little bit about yourself, too.
The league will use federal stimulus money to help individuals and families repair their homes to reduce their energy consumption and ultimately their utility bills. The league recently was awarded $4 million for its Weatherization and Rehabilitation Program. Chrite said the funds would be spread over three years.

One of the most important roles Chrite will perform as board chairman is heading the search committee for the league's new president and CEO. Kelly Langford, who took over in February 2007, is leaving the organization in August.

"The ideal candidate for the Urban League will have skills developed in the private sector. Someone who has passed the market test — someone who has met payroll," explained Chrite.

The board's plan is to have two or three finalists meet with community groups in mid-September and a selection made before the end of September.

Chrite said many businesses and nonprofits, state and local governments and universities need a new paradigm for success in the 21st century.

He offered General Motors, now going through a government-forced reinvention, as an example of a business that failed to adapt in changing economic circumstances.

Of the UA, Chrite said, "We're trying to augment our revenue streams so we don't have to rely so much on the state."

Of the Urban League, he said, "The league is being forced to think much more deeply about what it does and how it measures success."

And the league's board must hire a new president and CEO who can provide "the type of leadership and guidance that the league deserves," he said.

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Chyrl Hill Lander is a freelance writer in Tucson.

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