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University Place Entrepreneurialism in Society

Annette Miller, "Promoting Green Power Among Diverse Populations"

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- Jeanan Yasiri: Welcome back, everybody. This is Entrepreneurialism in Society. It's a course that's offered through the University of Wisconsin School of Human Ecology. I'm Jeanan Yasiri. As we begin today I'd like extend thanks to our partners in supporting this course: the UW Office of Corporate Relations, the UW College of Engineering for their technical support and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation for financial support. They provide much financial support to academic institutions that are advancing education in entrepreneurship. Additionally, we'd like to thank our media partners, Wisconsin Public Television, and their University Place crew for taping today's lecture. I'm very pleased to introduce our special guest today, Annette Miller, community services manager with Madison Gas and Electric. Annette's role with MG&E includes navigating development and improvement of business practices, public policy issues and systems that affect the economic, educational and personal lives of citizens, communities, neighborhoods, service organizations and their programs. She has been a resident of Madison for 21 years, and she is a graduate of the UW. Beyond her position with MG&E, Annette is very well known in our community for her dedication to social and economic justice, to racial and cultural diversity, to equity and understanding. Prior to joining MG&E, she spent more than a decade with public service with the State Wisconsin Department of Administration, the Department of Workforce Development and as a senior aide to the mayor of the city of Madison. As a community volunteer, she works with a myriad of nonprofit service organizations including MAGNET, the board of directors of St. Mary's Hospital and, most notably, the Urban League of Greater Madison which she chaired for two years and led its successful $4.1 million capital campaign creating the Center for Economic and Workforce Development, located on Madison's south side. As we start to explore engaging diverse audiences and how entrepreneurship certainly impacts that, I've asked Annette to come in and talk with us about how she does that on a day-to-day basis, especially as it is in context with green power and sustainability issues with MG&E. Please join me in welcoming Annette Miller.

[APPLAUSE]

- Annette Miller: Thank you, Jeanan. Well good afternoon everyone. How are you all doing? Okay, so it's the afternoon. Okay, I feel it. I remember, I wasn't sitting in this building, but I have sat on the other side. I know what the afternoon feels like, and I especially know what it feels like to be now in November and can't wait till we get some vacation time. You guys have been working pretty hard. So first of all thanks to Jeanan and others for asking me to come speak. I'm really excited about it, especially having attended UW Madison. And when listening to my own bio, the bottom line in terms of what I do is I work in the community. And I've been doing it for the last 10 years. And I specifically have been asked in the work that I do for different people is really to work with diverse groups. And I've been developing and cultivating that experience over the years. When I graduated from UW Madison and I went to work for state government I was working with diverse groups but from a policy perspective, working with veterans, working with people who want to be employed, working with kids with mental health trying to keep them in the community.

When I left state government, I went to the city of Madison and I worked for the current mayor when he first came into office and my job was to do community and neighborhood outreach. So my job was to make sure I had an understanding and a good pulse of what the issues were for the city of Madison. Homelessness, seniors, African American issues, what's going on in the Latino community, the Hmong community and a myriad of other things, too, in terms of the community centers and the nonprofits. So I've spent a lot of time working with many different groups and also working with a lot of different organizations that interface with those groups. And it's really been quite an enjoyable career to date. So in terms of promoting green power and sustainability among diverse populations, what I wanted to do is sort of first frame the conversation into why should we be thinking about this, why do we care. So always any good student always tries to look at the data first, right, do our homework. So one of the things that I did is I went to the Applied Population Lab over at the Department of Administration, they're always my favorite place for going to get data, especially about people, places and things. And I found that in terms of looking at the history of our demographics, when you compare the youngest and the oldest Wisconsinites, they have far different race and ethnic backgrounds and there's nearly the same population size. So what that means is for those who were over age 65, they have had a very different experience when it comes to dealing with diversity. Versus our young folks, zero to nine, are very adept at dealing with diversity every day when they go to school and even in their own homes. So what this tells us is that 30 years ago 5% of Wisconsin was diverse, and back in 2004 the data says that 26% of our community is racially and ethnically diverse in Wisconsin. The other thing I did in terms of doing some data mining was looking at this Madison school district. 50% of the students that are enrolled and graduating have a far different race and ethnic background as well. Basically, right now today, 50% of the students in the classroom are diverse, representing many different backgrounds. And that's in elementary, middle and high school. And basically what that means is those kids are coming out, going into the workforce, they're making decision about if they're going to stay in this community or if they're going to leave. Which means that by 2020 for sure and beyond, and I would even say today, it's diverse. And I think that all of you can tell politically that we're having a lot of interesting conversations about that diversity no matter you find yourself on the spectrum. So the future looks like this, but people in Wisconsin are used to dealing with this. So what that means then is we have to think creatively, or entrepreneurially if you will, about how we're going to promote ideas that are going to impact people. And when people have come from this background that they have expected and have experienced that the population is homogeneous so they expect that when they are dealing with people they are going to have the same values about money, about family, about education, about how they use their time, their beliefs around religion, family, life and even what they're needs are, money, food, security, success, there's been this assumption and presumption that everybody wants and needs and believes and values the same thing. So when people are marketing, and basically people are in businesses and other organizations, they've all been using their mind set about what they think will appeal to the people that they're trying to reach out to. But if the population is different, that means that there is no homogeneous customer or person out there with the same or similar values. So that means that they have different ideas about money, they have different ideas about family, they have different ideas about education, time, etc. And when you think about beliefs, same thing, religion, family, life, they're all different. The way people feel about money, the way they feel about food, the way they think about security and not security in the sense of police security but what makes them feel secure for themselves in their life, and even the notion of success. You find that culturally people have far different ideas about success than what's been put out there and been set up as the norm. So what that means then is we have to think about how can we match our promoting with people's values and their beliefs and their needs of this emerging and diverse demographic base. And it means that we have to start thinking beyond what happens in our own home or even our own life experiences whether you represent a diverse cultural group or not. We all come into situations using our own skills, and depending on what kind of training and education you have, your gut instincts may or may not be right. And so you have to think about that and you have to check that. And when it comes to promoting and focusing on green power and thinking about sustainability, the doors just totally blast open. And I'll give you some examples of what I've experienced. I've been working at MG&E for 5 years now, and my job is to reach out to low income customers, I'm to reach out to seniors, I'm to reach out to African American, Hmong and Latino. So that's quite a broad spectrum of people that I have to be thinking about on a day-to-day basis. And so that requires that for me in order to do a good job of doing outreach and engagement to those different groups, I have to really understand where they're coming from. So if we're talking about low income households, what do you think low income households are thinking about? Just shout it out. What would a low income household be thinking about? Come on, you guys.

- Money.

- Money, right? So if I go up and talk to them about how they can spend their money, how receptive do you think they're going to be to me? They'll be like, you're wasting my time. I'm not interested. And don't come back. So when I'm thinking about how can I approach a low income customer, I have to have some understanding about how they experience our business. And basically what that means for a utility company, we collect money because people have to pay for their energy. So a low income customer is having an experience with our company which may be that they can't pay their bill. The place that they live isn't very ideal in terms of enabling them to save more money. So since I'm in marketing and since I'm thinking about them from that perspective, what I did is I worked with different groups that work with low income households. And so one of the first things I did when I came to the company is after doing some research about how many people we're working with who are low income and what their concerns are, we put together what was called a Community Energy Resource Fair. And part of the strategy behind putting that together was to do outreach to low income communities, work with organizations that deal day-to-day with low income households. When people came to this Community Energy Resource Fair they were not dealing with MG&E because if I asked somebody to come to a fair at MG&E, I doubt they would show up. So we were out in the community in the neighborhood centers where you would expect to find a lot of low income households. And then what we had at the event is we had energy assistance. So energy assistance is a big thing when it comes to low income households. It's based on eligibility. It's being able to come in and make an appointment. So one of the things that we did is we asked the energy assistance people to be on site. So instead of somebody having to call, having to make an appointment, and in the low income world this means that I might not get an appointment until December but I'm having a problem today trying to pay my bill and I have to wait till December. So we'd have this fair, they'd be able to come on site that day and have an appointment and be able to talk to someone about how they can manage their bill. We also partnered with a different organization that weatherizes homes for low income households. So then when people are done talking about how they're going to pay their bill, they're going to go talk to someone else about what can I do to improve my home so the heat doesn't literally go out the window and make my bill much higher. So providing those resources on site immediately it does a couple of things. One, it's meeting their needs at where they're at, not where I'm at, where they're at. But the other thing is it's reducing their stress. If you've ever lived a low income life where there's not a whole lot of money, you can imagine that it's very stressful. There's a lot of things that aren't available in that household and so if there's a way for us to reduce that stress and create a one stop shop environment, which is what we were trying to do, we were doing something positive for that community. The other thing by doing something like this is we're trying to create a relationship with the low income community. We want them to know that, yes, we do collect your money to pay for a service, well it's not a service that they actually can turn off or on, but they are having a financial relationship with us and we want them to know that we're not just here to collect your money, we actually want to try and also have some kind of relationship where if you're having problems we can see how we can address those and make it a little bit easier. And so trying to create products and services along those lines. The senior community has similar issues. A lot of times seniors are on a fixed income. They're older. When you're the age you are, I'll even stretch it and say the age I am, you feel like you've got a handle on all the information. You can keep stuff in your head. You don't have to write things down. Your body is doing all the things you want it to do and more. Now you find yourself 80 years old. Maybe you can't get around the way that you used to. Maybe your memory isn't operating in the way that you would like it to. Your finances are really limited. So now we have to think about what can we do to make things easier when we're reaching out to seniors. What would be helpful? And that means thinking about what kind of phone conversation they're going to have with us. A lot of times we find that seniors no longer have their partner in their home so they may be lonely. So they might call and have questions for us, and we take the time to answer their questions no matter how many they have, relevant or not relevant to the purpose for why they called. Going out into their neighborhoods and making sure that we partner with the senior centers and talk to them about different options they may have in terms of paying their bill. They also need energy assistance a lot of times and other things as well. And so those are the types of things that we have to think about when we're doing this outreach and engagement. It would be really easy to just send out an email and try to collect emails from everybody and give information that way. But someone who's older, and I found this when I was at a couple of events, when we try to collect email addresses from seniors, they're not a very trusting group. So I can't make my job simpler by just getting somebody's email and sending them some information and saying hey did you know that you can apply for energy assistance this way. Or hey did you know that if you turn your thermostat down to 68 degrees you'll save money because the seniors aren't going to give me their email address or they may not have an email address to give. So those are the ways in which I have to think creatively about how can I get information and how can I get them to trust that the information that I'm giving them will benefit and be of interest to them. A different example is religion. If you think about the Muslim community, women do not talk to men. At our company, it's predominately male. So when our service guys are going out in the community and they knock on the door, they have a feeling that someone's there but no one is answering the door, it could be that it's a female and she doesn't feel comfortable answering the door either for religious purposes or for some other reason. So how do we reach out to someone who's at home but won't answer the door. Or perhaps it could be a language issue. So again, our job as a utility company is to provide good information but also to make sure that our customers are safe. So then we have to constantly be thinking about how can we reach out to people who may not necessarily understand that that's our intent. That's the way I also mean in terms of learning to understand and learning to change the way that we think about-- We can't take our values and put them on other people because they may not work. And it may work when you're hanging around people that you know on a regular and ongoing basis, but we're talking about people that you don't know that you have to provide a service to one way or another. So thinking about what their values are, what their beliefs are, and thinking about what you could do to be creative to be able to engage them is always the thought process that you need to be working through. So how do you do that? You do it through training. Obviously you guys are here spending your afternoon with me. So that's training. But also thinking about when you're thinking about an organization like MG&E it's training. And I'm actually working on a project for the company where you're trying to work with the our employees about understanding how the community is changing and it's becoming more diverse. So we're giving that training not only to staff but also to management. It's bringing diverse talent within. That doesn't necessarily mean that because you have someone who's diverse they're all of the sudden going to solve all of the problems around cultural competency but they may be able to relate and bring ideas to the table with their perspective and what they understand about their own community. Partnering with diverse talent, whether it's going into the nonprofit community or working with community leaders who work with people who are diverse, talking to them and trying to understand and find out how can I better serve, how can I better understand, what could we do that would resonate and feel true to the people that we're trying to reach out to. And obviously the most obvious is asking customers. Asking them what do you want and what do you need? Now it does not mean that we will always be able to meet their needs in the way that they want. And I'll give you a good example. I do a lot of workshops in the evenings, in fact I'll do one tonight, and I'll be talking to people about how to save energy, and it never fails that someone will come up to me and say do you guys give discounts for energy. And I'm like, no, unfortunately we don't. And even employees don't get discounts. We have to pay the whole bill. But from that person's perspective, they're expressing a need or a desire. They would like to see how they could pay less for their energy. And actually in some cities across the US, utilities do have different rates based on different time of day or they have different rates based on people's income. It just so happens that we don't do that here in Wisconsin. So, again, asking customers what they want and trying to see how you can fill those needs are important. And then obviously measuring and monitoring. It's great to have great ideas but if they don't work, you probably want to stop doing it and try something else, and making sure that you have something in place to measure and monitor that success or lack of success is really important. An example with that is I brought up the Community Energy Resource Fair. When we did that four years ago it was very successful. We were reaching out to well over 200 to 300 people each heating season which is between November and March. So we were doing a really good job, but one of the things we started finding as we got into the third year and the fourth year is we weren't seeing the same success as we saw when we first did it. And we were trying to ask ourselves, well, why is that? And so some of the things that we did is when it came to reaching out to the Latino community instead of having a Community Energy Resource Fair that was in Spanish where people had to come to to take workshops and to make their appointments, we now are on the radio. We're on La Movida. And we actually, this morning, did a two-hour show where we did our community energy show on our radio show that we do it every month for an hour. The second Wednesday of each month we are on the show for an hour talking about energy-related topics. And today we had two hours on the show where we went out to five different community neighborhood centers and were giving out information about energy assistance, about weatherizations, they were talking about it over the air. And a couple things have happened is we're finding that this approach has really resonated very well. We have higher walk-ins of our Latino and Hispanic community coming into MG&E in the customer service area. We have more people calling and asking questions and having concerns about their home and how they can make their home more weather resistant. And just also having a relationship with MG&E. A lot of times I'll be out in the community and people will come up to me and say oh, I heard your radio show, that was really great, thank you so much for doing that. So that means that we've created a connection and we've built some trust with the group that in the past we didn't have a relationship with and they didn't know if we were interested in their needs or concerns. So hiring bilingual customer service represents is something that has changed at MG&E. Where we had no bilingual reps for the Spanish speaking community, we have like seven or eight. And we always have at least one in the walk-ins at MG&E. That's something that changed within the time that I've been there. When I came there I think there was probably about four or five, and now they've almost doubled that. And also while I've been there we've been doing a lot of outreach with the Hmong community which has been very difficult. They're a very insular group. They really have very low trust of the mainstream community. So trying to do outreach with that group I've spent three years talking and working with people who are in the Hmong community trying to understand their issues. And I have to say for someone who has felt that they're really good at working with different types of people, that was really challenging for me because the way in which they do things culturally seemed to be the exact opposite of how I do things. An example is the Hmong New Year. It's taking place over Thanksgiving. So what do I normally do at Thanksgiving? I usually get in my car and go travel to visit with my family. But now I'm staying home and they're having their Hmong New Year event on Friday and Saturday, the day after Thanksgiving. That's exactly opposite. That feels uncomfortable. But if my job is to reach out to a group that I've been asked to reach out to I have to get over it, and I have to figure out how to make myself more comfortable. Talking with the Hmong community, I've been over at the Kajsiab House. A lot of the elders are there. It's an adult daycare center for the Hmong community and talking to them and listening to them try to speak English, very difficult. The sounds are not, the way they use their system of speech does not relate to how we talk in terms of English. So when I was trying to say their name and when they were trying to say my name, they were having a really difficult time. And they actually said I was doing a better job of saying their name than they were of trying to say mine. Another thing I learned in working them is they're really humble and really feel like they can't learn. They're having a really difficult time trying to understand how we do things. So they have a difficult time trying to speak English. A lot of the elders came as refugees. So they're trying to use things that weren't even in their culture. Stoves, refrigerators, all of the things that we take for granted they didn't really have that because their life was so completely different. So I have to actually start at ground zero in terms of trying to help them understand what energy even is and how electricity even works. And that's not to say that these are people who are not intelligent, not smart, it's just that the way that they live their life was dramatically different than how they've lived it here. And as they have had their families here, the whole cross-cultural change, even in their household, here these older individuals in the home had this whole different life experience and their children are having this different experience, this American experience, that's way different. So you can just imagine what kind of conversations are going on in that household. And that resonates with me because my mother is German and parents met in Germany. My dad was in the military, he was in the army. And I was born in Germany. My mother was in Germany until she was 23. She came over to the United States. She got her citizenship. And one of the things she told me about the citizenship piece was that it was really hard for her to have to denounce her whole life that she had lived and grown up in Germany. So everything that she knew that's been passed down through the family she had to denounce that because now she's a U.S. American citizen. And if you're not from a different place, that may not make sense, but just think if there's something that you've been taught your whole entire life and then someone asks you, you have to just forget it and you have to embrace something else. It's really difficult. And I remember my sister and I giving my mom a really hard time about school. Or even just with our friends we're like you're German you don't get it, you don't understand. This is how we do it in the United States. This is how we do it in America. You just don't get. So those kinds of conversations go on in these households. So it's very interesting. Training staff and management about diversity, and I think I've kind of touched on that. And then also making sure that the information that you're providing is presented in a way that people can understand. Whether it's allowing the website to be able to have the font get really big if someone has a difficult time seeing and they need to have the font extremely large. Or making sure that materials that we have aren't just in English but also in Spanish or some other language. For our company, what we've done is we've translated most of our materials into Spanish. We have some limited information in Hmong, mainly because one of the things we're finding out in working with the Hmong community is that it's very difficult to translate, you can't translate word for word. The way in which the Hmong community talks and the way in which, well one, there was no written language in the Hmong community so they've created one. So now the Hmong community is trying to learn a language that's written that wasn't in place and now they have to learn that. And then some of the things don't translate. And especially in the field that I am in. Talking about a furnace or a water heater or electricity or natural gas. Some of those words just don't translate. And they may not translate in the way that we think either. So other things that people can do and what we do is being on boards and committees that engage or outreach to diverse audiences. Like Jeanan said in my resume, I've been on the Urban League board. There's a group called The Soup that meets regularly once a month. There's a Latino Children and Family Council. The Financial Education Center. Madison Area Diversity Roundtable. There's all kinds of different organizations and groups and entities that get together to try and reach out to different groups of people. Senior centers, neighborhood centers boys and girls clubs, the YWCA, the YMCA and many, many more. The Literacy Council, all of those places and spaces are an opportunity to outreach and engage and be able to have a better understanding of how other people live, think and do things differently. The other thing that we do, too, is we try to be at different events and festivals with diverse audiences. The great thing about Madison is they do really a great job of reflecting what's in this community in terms of all walks of life. And so we really try to make sure that we're present from a financial perspective but also just personally. To the topic of promoting green power and sustainability, one of our engineers put together a solar trailer. So it is a mobile trailer that has solar panels on it, and when they first made it I raised my hand and volunteered myself to bring that solar trailer to some of the ethnic festivals because in my opinion I have felt that our company hadn't done a really good job of getting that information out about green power or even the notion of sustainability, that they probably wouldn't be interested or have an interest in it. And when I brought it to the festivals over the summer, I was really amazed at how many people were so interested in the display but asking some really good questions about what is it, what does it do, how would I be able to have this in my home, how much does it cost. So I think it was an all around surprise not only for the company but even for the people in the community to have something like this where they could come and walk through and see for themselves how solar power works. And there was some really neat displays inside the trailer where we were really able to do some education as well. So it's doing things like that that really can make a difference in terms of how different groups in the community think about you as an individual or as a company and how they'll respond to you. And I think one of the things that I found to be personally true is a lot of the different customer groups, and particularly cultural groups, they're really looking to see if you're sincere. Are you just trying to sell them something or are you really interested in what's happening with them, what their issues are, what their concerns are and how far you're willing to go to really connect with them and to meet them where they're at. And some people want the quick and easy way, other people are willing to do the work. And it just sort of depends on where you're at on that. Partnerships. I have to say that partnerships are probably my number one way of really trying to work with different groups. I'm African American and German. Just because I am does not make me an expert, by any stretch of the imagination of African American or German issues. So I make sure that I am talking to people who are working with folks in the community all the time. Just because I'm a personal of color does not make me an expert. So partnering is really important. So with groups like La Movida, Wisconsin Women of Color Network. I put AKAs just to make the note of fraternities and sororities are really big way to do outreach. There's a radio show called Let's Go to Church. There's the Kajsiab House. There's the Dane County Parent Council which works with low income households. Senior coalitions. And this list could be extremely long but I made it extremely short just to give you a flavor of what's how the there. And so that's what we've done in terms of trying to outreach and engage the different customer groups. Every year we get better and better, but I have to say that the demographics are constantly changing. I even know that as I'm doing my work there are other different groups that we need to be working with and outreaching to as well. So constantly having an awareness of who's out there, who hasn't been touched by our message and what can we do so change that is part of my daily job. And luckily I don't do it alone. There's another person in my office who's also a community services manager and actually has been there longer than I have. So we've done a really good job of partnering up and splitting up some of the work. And we're working on, in our side of the house, of making sure that we try to bring different perspectives into the group as well. One of the things that I did do is I brought, they always say a picture says a thousands words, so we'll see if that's true, but some things that we've been engaged in in terms of what kind of promotional things we do. When we did our radio show we put this flyer together. It says viviendo con energia, which is living with energy. And one of the funny things about translating from English to Spanish is I was talking to some of my friends who are Spanish and I was like okay I need you to tell me what we should call this radio show because when they think of energy they think of energy as in happy, movement, and I'm talking about, no electricity and natural gas. So when we were talking about what should we call this show, I was trying to make sure that I talked to some people who know what they're doing so that we don't inadvertently call our show something really kooky and crazy. So that's what we put together for working with the Latino community. In terms of low income community, I did a partnership with UW Extension, the Financial Education Center, and we put together this workbook called Grow Your Green. I'm in marketing, I love trying to use words because my undergrad was an English major so I really like trying to work with words and have double meanings with things. So I wanted to resonate with people who are going to be in this workshop and growing your green. So how can you put more money in your pocket but green from the perspective of green power and sustainability. I spent a lot of time working with youth. I don't just limit my work to just adults. So Earth Day, actually we have a K-12 person at our company who does this work but in the summer I do a summer energy education program. I did it with the Boys and Girls Club for a couple years, and then this year I went to the Kajsiab House and worked with some of the some of the young people there and did some outreach off of this newsletter. When we went to take the solar trailer out, again I wanted to play on words so you probably can't see this but what it says is be cool, naturally. So really getting people to think about what are they already doing to reduce their footprint but be cool at the same time because it's the summertime. So I had a lot of fun with this one. And on that display we had LED ice cubes. We had laundry lines with t-shirts hanging off of it. We had the solar trailer there. So people had a really good time thinking through ways in which they could reduce their footprint. When I was on the radio show, it's always hard to talk about energy and to get people really interested in it and think it's as sexy as I think it is, so one of the topics we had was holidays and ways to save energy. So I couldn't keep talking about hey do you want to learn some more ways to save energy. I tied in the upcoming holidays. So what I really talked about was using LED holiday lights, thinking about using timers, talking to them about cooking. A lot of times cooking is a really big thing that happens around the holidays. Hopefully people have a lot of family and friends around. And then just sort of going through different kinds of concepts that might happen around the holidays and taking advantage of that and connecting that to energy and making it a little bit more interesting. For the church community, the first couple of years we had these little hand fans. So these were pretty popular. Especially one time when we went to the festival it was like 90 degrees, so these went like hotcakes. But just to sort of make a connection with the church community, hand fans are a big thing in some churches. And so we had seven hot tips to save energy this summer. I know some of you are probably secretly laughing. It's okay, it looks a little goony but it works. Let's see, what else. Get a grip. Get a grip on energy costs so we put our home energy line. So a little gimmicky, but again using words and trying to use those words to engage and outreach people and create a connection. When we go out to events we try to reflect some of the places and spaces that we've been. So a lot of this stuff that we put up we try to make sure that it reflects the community. So somebody might see them self in a poster like this when we're doing our workshops, and then we also when we were at the Hmong New Year we had both English and Hmong. And that's actually a new strategy that we've embarked on is we now do both English and the other language and we try to have it on the same piece of paper because if you're an emerging language learner, you're not all the way there. So sometimes it can be really helpful to have English on one side and your native language on the other side to be able to help you navigate the messages. So I think last but not least we've been doing calendars for the last two years. We did one in Hmong and one in Spanish. And actually this year we're going to do one that's multicultural so it kind of is a reflection of all the different community in Madison. And what we did is we worked, with this particular one we worked with two people in the Hmong community to help us put this together. And the reason I bring this up is because one of the things that I personally like to do, and MG&E is in agreement because they haven't fired me yet, is that I really like to leverage and make things a win-win. I want something from the people that I'm working with, but I also want to leave them with something too. So sponsoring their events or leveraging businesses that might be out in the community, if there's a way for me to work with them so that I'm enhancing what they're trying to do in terms of their role in the community, I always try to make it a win-win. And that's something that's been really quite fun in the work that I've done. So in this particular instance, one person works at the company, the other person was the photographer, and so I paid the photographer for the pictures that were provided that reflected the Hmong community. And then when we printed the calendar I made sure that both their names were on the calendar basically saying thanks for the work that they put into putting this together because I certainly couldn't have done this myself. So that's it. I don't know where Jeanan is. How did I do for time?

- You did great for time. I forgot to give you your 20-minute cue as you had requested. So it's my fault.

- Okay.

- But I would open it up for questions.

[INAUDIBLE]

Can you hear that?

- And I did put some questions up on the board, too, just to give you an opportunity to reflect on some things.

- Hi, my name is Monique. I was just wondering what did you take away from when you were in policy in the capital and things like that, and what did you bring to your job here as to be a better community leader or supporter?

- That's a really good question. This is what I figured out is what especially when I was doing policy work, I graduated in '92, at that time there weren't really a lot of people of color who were at the table when it comes to making policy. This is actual language that's going to the legislature or going into administrative rule to design what people can or cannot get from the money that the state might be providing for different programs. So my take-away was I was really glad that I was interested in policy because I could be somebody who could sit at the table and give a different perspective about how policy might impact some of the community groups that they were making policy about. And I think, also too, the other take-away was it helped me really understand sort of the larger conversation that we're having today about a lot of different things. I have such a greater awareness of how things work having been behind the scenes. It's interesting to listen to people go well they just need to do this, that, the other. And I'm like well I was on the other side and if they could do it just like this, believe me it would be done. So I have a greater appreciation of what it really takes to move policy and make change. And I think that's the reason I do the work that I do because policy's great but it takes a really long time and it takes a lot of work to get everybody on the same page. Whereas when I'm out in the community, there's such a much more immediate impact. I know when I went and did this workshop I literally see people going I get what she's talking about, I understand that.

- I'll ask a final question, Annette, how do you measure your success? This is kind of a difficult area to measure success, but I'm curious what kind of measures MG&E considers to be of importance.

- A lot of it is qualitative. One of the things that I found out about my company that I also appreciate is that when you start something new that hasn't been done a lot of times the numbers don't necessarily support the reason for which you might be trying out something new. And so there's a couple of demographics out there that are really small, extremely small. And a case in point is the Hmong community. It's not really large when you compare it to the Latino community, but they still went ahead and made an investment to hire a Hmong customer service rep. And one of the things that we're finding is as we keep promoting the Hmong customer service rep, the calls are going up. And it's not exponentially like it did with the Latino community but it is going up which is the right direction. Same thing with the work we've done in terms of people calling, call volume has gone up in terms of people calling, and we like to think that that's attributable to the work that we do out in the community. Again, we've definitely seen a difference with the Latino community. The walk-ins have really increased significantly where they had to dedicate one of the walk-in representatives to be there all the time who could speak Spanish. And the same thing with the phones. They had a lot fewer customer service reps who were bilingual, and they have almost twice the amount that they had seven years ago.

- Great. Well I know the students join me in thanking you for being with us today. Thanks Annette Miller.

[APPLAUSE]