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Philadelphia Futures, White-Williams Scholars to merge

Premium content from Philadelphia Business Journal - by Peter Key, Staff Writer

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Two of the region's best-known nonprofits in the area of helping students from low-income backgrounds graduate high school and get into college have agreed upon the terms of the merger they announced earlier this year.

Philadelphia Futures and White-Williams Scholars have agreed to combine July 1. Although White-Williams Scholars will be the surviving entity, it will be called Philadelphia Futures. The structure of the merger will enable the new organization to retain White-Williams' status as one of the oldest nonprofits in the nation and claim 1800 as its founding date.

Joan Mazzotti, Philadelphia Futures' executive director, will retain her role with the new Philadelphia Futures. White-Williams' interim executive director, **Kathleen Larkin**, who replaced **Amy Holdsmann** last September, will stay in her position until the merger is completed, but will have no formal role with the new Philadelphia Futures.

All the members of both organizations boards' of trustees were invited to join the board of the new Philadelphia Futures and most did, said **Ann Semmer**, a former White-Williams board member and the new board's president.

Philadelphia Futures will run both of its predecessors' programs in the upcoming fiscal year, although it won't be accepting any new students into White-Williams' program. Simultaneously, it will launch a strategic planning process to determine how it can best function going forward.

"What we'd like to do is take the best from both programs and next year offer a combined program that offers a broader range of services than either organization had individually to a broader group of students," Semmer said.

The new organization will have an annual budget of a little more than \$3 million, a combination of the \$1.6 million budget of the old Philadelphia Futures and the \$1.4 million

budget of White-Williams Scholars.

Philadelphia Futures and White-Williams Scholars work with similar students and have similar goals but try to attain them in different ways.

Philadelphia Futures works with students at the worst-performing high schools in Philadelphia through its Sponsor-A-Scholar program, which provides students with a range of support services from the time they enter ninth grade until they graduate from college. The services include mentors, after-school programs, enhanced staff support and \$6,000 for the students to use on books and other expenses while in college.

White-Williams Scholars had provided monthly stipends to low-income students who did well in high school, but was in the process of changing its model so it could continue supporting the students while they were in college. Combining with Philadelphia Futures gave it a way to do that.

"That is one of the examples of why this is going to work," Mazzotti said.

Both Philadelphia Futures and White-Williams Scholars were on solid financial footing, Mazzotti said, and she expects the merger to make them more so. The new organization doesn't plan on cutting staff, but expects to save money on rent when it can combine its offices and on such other items as insurance and printing fees.

"This is not about reducing services," she said. "It is about increasing services."

The United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania has been encouraging area nonprofits to work together in ways from informal alliances up to mergers for the past few years.

"[Mergers] are hard to do," said **Ann Schmieg**, the United Way's senior vice president, community impact. "I really applaud the board and the directors of both [Philadelphia Futures and White-Williams Scholars] for really asking the questions and not being afraid to move down that road."