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Bay Area People

CAREER MOVES IN THE REGION'S PROFESSIONAL SECTORS

NONPROFIT

SF Works executive director invests in families

BY GEORGE KHALAF
San Francisco Business Times

Carrie Portis has made a career of seeing opportunities within systemic problems. **SF Works**, in the midst of implementing a new strategy, hired Portis as executive director.

Portis succeeds Theresa Feeley who, after a seven-year tenure, remains with the nonprofit service for low-income workers and San Francisco employers as a senior adviser.

Established in 1997 by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, the Committee on Jobs and the United Way of the Bay Area, SF Works originally specialized in workforce training for emerging fields in the Bay Area. Now it will support career development and connect low-wage employees to community resources such as assistance with rent, taxes, financial services, childcare, utilities and insurance.

"A family of four would need over \$77,000 annually for basic necessities. Twenty-six percent of San Francisco households live below that line," said Portis. "We've gone out, met with

employees, and signed them up to benefits they didn't know they were eligible for." Portis is also looking out for the interest of the employers that partner with SF Works such as helping them access available tax credits. "We are thinking about how we can support workers, while engaging businesses and what businesses we can provide the most value to," she said.



Portis

Portis will oversee a staff of six and team with public officials, local businesses, and other networks to facilitate the mission.

"We are looking for places to experiment with the program, working with employers to improve the jobs people already have," she said. "The program is available strictly through the workplace, and businesses can simply contact us."

Previously the Berkeley resident was chief of staff for the Stupski Foundation. Prior to that, she was director of enterprise development with the Rubicon

Programs, where she created several community-based businesses, including a health-care business, a business development center, workforce training programs and the Rubicon Bakery.

The London, Ontario, native studied economics and history at Wellesley College and earned an M.B.A. from Stanford University Graduate School of Business in 1995.

After graduating from Wellesley, Portis moved to the Bay Area two weeks before the 1989 earthquake.

"I had a couple of corporate job interviews, then (after the quake) everything stopped. So I volunteered at hospitals, did some tutoring, and went into public service," she said.

Portis worked with the St. Anthony Foundation and the Tenderloin Housing Clinic before going to graduate school. "I wanted to understand how to take my values of wanting to make a difference from a business approach and how to link it to broader change," she said. "The success of families and communities is so dependent on economic stability."

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