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Bill would give undocumented legal status
Proposal would require fine, background checks.

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- Teacher accused of failing to report molestation

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- Motivational speaker accused in Vegas death

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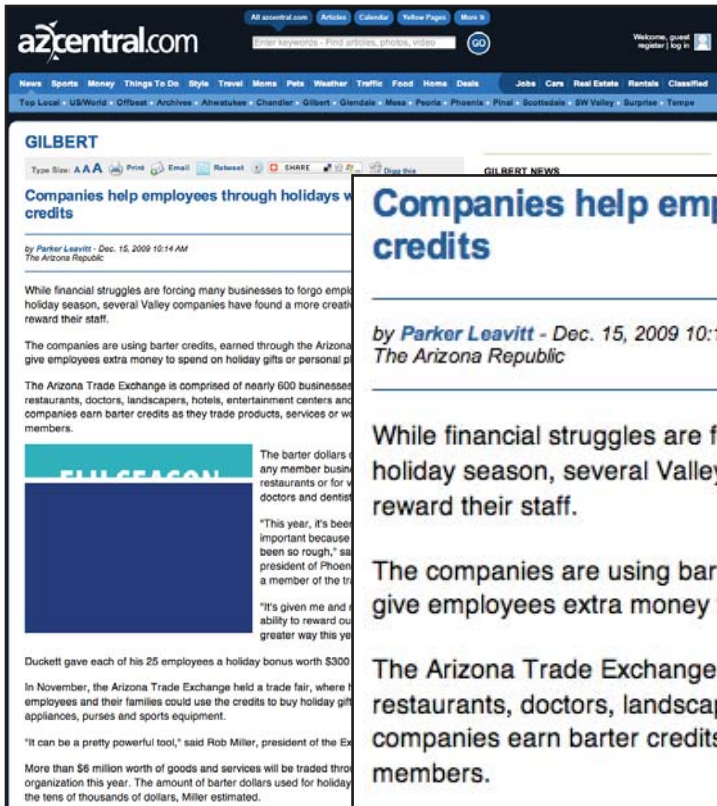
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Companies help employees through holidays with barter credits

by Parker Leavitt - Dec. 15, 2009 10:14 AM
The Arizona Republic

While financial struggles are forcing many businesses to forgo employee bonuses this holiday season, several Valley companies have found a more creative, resourceful way to reward their staff.

The companies are using barter credits, earned through the Arizona Trade Exchange, to give employees extra money to spend on holiday gifts or personal pleasures.

The Arizona Trade Exchange is comprised of nearly 600 businesses, including restaurants, doctors, landscapers, hotels, entertainment centers and more. The member companies earn barter credits as they trade products, services or work with other members.

The barter dollars can then be spent at any member business - for food at restaurants or for vital services from doctors and dentists.

"This year, it's been even more important because the economy has been so rough," said Jim Duckett, president of Phoenix-based Net Fusion, a member of the trade exchange.

"It's given me and my company the ability to reward our employees in a greater way this year."

Duckett gave each of his 25 employees a holiday bonus worth \$300 in barter credits.

In November, the Arizona Trade Exchange held a trade fair, where hundreds of employees and their families could use the credits to buy holiday gifts like toys, appliances, purses and sports equipment.



"It can be a pretty powerful tool," said Rob Miller, president of the Exchange.

More than \$6 million worth of goods and services will be traded through Miller's organization this year. The amount of barter dollars used for holiday bonuses is likely in the tens of [thousands of dollars](#), Miller estimated.

"I really noticed a big push for employee holiday bonuses last year, and I don't think it went down this year," he said.

A few business owners have told Miller that without the barter credits, they would not be able to afford employee bonuses at all.

"Last year, one employee said that without the trade bonus, his kids would not have had Christmas presents," Miller said.

Wayne Taylor, owner of Taylors Flooring in Mesa, said he uses the barter system to reward his employees during the holidays and on their birthdays.

"They like it because instead of using it to pay a bill, it's more of a bonus to them where they can go out and buy certain things," Taylor said.

The recent growth and increased popularity of the Arizona Trade Exchange, which began 10 years ago, has apparently been accelerated by the [economic downturn](#), Miller said.

"We're all booming," Miller said of an estimated 600 trade exchanges in the U.S. "Because it's truly one of the few companies that is recession proof."

As a result, the Arizona Trade Exchange continues to add to its membership and has doubled its staff in the last seven months.

"In 2005, it was difficult to get some companies to trade, because they were so busy," Miller said. "Thankfully for our industry, right now there aren't a lot of businesses turning people away."