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MIDWEEK, DECEMBER 16, 2009 www.gilbertrepublic.com Z12 SECTION 6E

HIGLEY CENTER REQUEST
The Higley Center for the Performing Arts is reaching out to the public for support but not for money. The center seeks community members to serve on an advisory council and a volunteer services program.
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Firms giving barter bucks
Instead of bonuses, many businesses are using barter credits through the Arizona Trade Exchange to reward their employees. Barter dollars can go toward a variety of options, from dining out to dentist visits.
PAGE 14

Audience is key to holiday show
"You're All I Want for Christmas" combines improvised sketches and Christmas songs, with audience participation an integral part.
PAGE 19

A different world of healthcare
Southeast Valley hospital workers Keri Sutton (right) and Nancy Tolman were part of a volunteer medical mission in Guatemala, spending 10 days caring for the country's poor.
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Parents strike up band for pupils' music
Parents worried that GPS may further cut music programs have created an advocacy group. Also see Our Turn commentary.
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NEWS & MONEY
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OP GILBERT

Firms help employees via barter credits
By Parker Leavitt
THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

Phoenix-based Net Fusion, a member of the trade exchange, would not be able to afford employee bonuses at all.

"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.

"This year, it has 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.

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 past seven months.

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FINAL DAYS! FINAL DAYS! OUR LAST XMAS WEEK!

Firms help employees via barter credits
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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 and entertainment centers. 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.

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