



Nancy Sims
President and CEO

Robert Toigo Foundation

A Conversation with Nancy Sims

*Since its creation in 1989, the **Robert Toigo Foundation** has become a valued partner in the finance industry, and its reach and impact have continued to grow during the past two decades. The foundation is well known for its programs and initiatives that promote workforce diversity, and its MBA fellowship program has helped to prepare approximately 1,000 students for careers in finance. In recent years, the Toigo Foundation has expanded its menu of services to focus on leadership development and career advancement for both minorities and women. **Nancy Sims**, president and CEO of the Toigo Foundation, recently spoke with **Larry Gray**, editorial director at Institutional Real Estate, Inc., to discuss the organization's focus today, new programs and initiatives, and the challenges of diversity within today's environment.*

What is the history of the Robert Toigo Foundation? And what is the organization's mission?

The foundation was created 23 years ago to address the absence of under-represented groups within the field of finance. Starting in partnership with members of both the investment management and plan sponsor communities, the organization focused initially on identifying pre-MBAs with promise and providing financial support, mentoring and job placement assistance as part of their entrée into financial services. We started with seven students, and today we work with roughly 120 students across 17 of the top 25 U.S.-based business schools. Fellows are selected based on high academic performance, a demonstrated commitment to a career in finance, a strong sense of community giveback and high ethical standards.

Over the past few years, Toigo has expanded strategically by leveraging our track record of identifying diverse talent to a broader mission of talent retention, career advancement and leadership at all levels. We introduced a uniquely designed leadership curriculum and launched a focused career management platform to serve

individuals at the mid- and senior career levels as well as institutions seeking more senior talent. Programs aimed at career entrée and growth within the alternative sector and board leadership were also launched. We've rebranded ourselves as an organization that addresses diversity leadership issues from the classroom to the boardroom.

The Toigo MBA Fellowship, however, remains a vibrant component of our work — now as a two-year gateway to a much larger, expanded agenda of professional advancement and business leadership envisioned for this talented group.

What is the importance of diversity at the corporate executive level? What types of measures are firms in the financial arena taking to build a diverse team and culture?

Beyond numerous studies that show the merits of diversity, it's also a fact that as organizations, regardless of sector, are considering strategies for sustainability, growth or redirection, they are evaluating human capital requirements that bring new energy, new ideas in ways that will move the needle. Forward-thinking companies look

Too often hiring diverse talent is framed with an implicit sense of risk or quality tradeoff. Toigo is dispelling that myth by presenting to the industry the best — outstanding professionals, high-caliber talent and fresh, multicultural perspectives and experiences.

Copyright © 2012 by Institutional Real Estate, Inc. Material may not be reproduced in whole or in part without the express written permission of the publisher.

for great talent regardless of demographic specifications such as race, age or gender. As the market demands change, so do client expectations and customer profiles. Studies show that diverse teams deliver better, more robust thinking — and results. Too often hiring diverse talent is framed with an implicit sense of risk or quality tradeoff. Toigo is dispelling that myth by presenting to the industry the best — outstanding professionals, high-caliber talent and fresh, multicultural perspectives and experiences. We know — and have witnessed — how organizations that make talent and diverse perspectives core to their DNA truly thrive. For organizations where diversity has not necessarily been valued, Toigo can serve as a great partner to address resistance and talk about what might work within a firm's culture.

As a nonprofit organization, how do you fund the various programs that the Toigo Foundation sponsors?

Toigo develops programs and secure underwriting based on the merits and impact of each program — just as a business would launch and fund a new venture. Toigo benefits from the financial support and participation of the members firms in the financial services industry across all sectors. We respect the engagement of firms from the real estate sector that have been involved with Toigo for many years and who employ Toigo talent. Firms such as Clarion Partners, MacFarlane, Eastdil Secured, Artemis, CBRE, RREEF and others are institutions where Toigo alumni have grown as leaders. Our goal is to continue to expand our engagement with the real estate community.

Tell me about the Toigo MBA Fellowship Program.

The Fellowship is the heart — and starting point — of our work. We have an applicant pool of 250-plus pre-MBA candidates who have applied to and been accepted by top MBA programs for the upcoming fall. Those who are selected as finalists go through a very rigorous interview process that is conducted on a national basis. We select 50 or 60 to become

Toigo Fellows. The profile of MBA candidates today is impressive. They average 4.5 years of work experience prior to business school and an average 700 GMAT score. Many have family obligations, which means they possess focus and a high level of responsibility and maturity. About 12 percent of Fellows have designated real estate as their area of top career interest. The financial support that Toigo receives from industry firms is used to support Fellows and Toigo programs. Fellows receive a financial award paid to the school on their behalf, as well as mentoring and talent management assistance, including career coaching and strategy support, which given today's market dynamics has proved invaluable. Toigo also provides industry education and leadership development workshops, providing firms with an opportunity to participate on panels or webinars to share knowledge of industry and investment trends and skill-set requirements. Over the past few years, our Fellowship program and support has focused on ensuring successful positioning of Toigo talent against a highly competitive employment landscape.

You have always emphasized mentoring for Toigo Fellows. Who is involved in the program and how does it work?

Mentoring is a cornerstone of both career and professional development, and Toigo offers Fellows the enriching experience of being paired with an industry professional for a formal two-year assignment — although many relationships extend well beyond the formal timeframe.

Mentors are drawn from firms based on the student's area of interest and paired to ensure expectations are matched with respect to time and need. Today more experienced alumni are seeking more senior-level mentoring, which is a growing trend to help navigate more critical career decisions and strategies. Toigo invites professionals who wish to serve as a mentor or mentoring resource to contact the Foundation.

How many alumni of the program are currently working in the finance

industry, and in what types of roles and with what types of companies?

Proudly, more than 90 percent of our alumni hold careers in finance in investment-focused positions from entry level to director to business owner. On a sector level, 15 percent of Toigo alumni work in real estate. There are Toigo alumni serving the industry as consultants with such firms as Cambridge or Clearwater, as well as a number of alumni working as investment officers at pension funds, endowments or foundations. A growing number of Toigo alumni are launching their own asset management firms focused within alternatives, including real estate. For Toigo, business ownership is a true hallmark of success.

Who are some of the alumni of your program?

One Toigo alumna who is widely recognized is Raudline Etienne. She served as CIO of the New York State Common Retirement Fund for several years and is now at Albright-Stonebridge. Raudline was previously an investment consultant at Rogerscasey.

Reggie Sanders is currently director of investments at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. He is a Toigo alumnus from Harvard who previously served on the investment team at Kodak. Prior to Kodak, Reggie was employed by AEW in Boston. In his current role, Reggie is responsible for investment policy and strategy, and portfolio and investment management.

On the investment side, Amachie Ackah, a Wharton graduate, is managing partner of Argosy Real Estate, a real estate opportunity fund where he has oversight responsibilities for all investment, strategic, and operational activities of the firm. He is also co-head of the investment committee.

Onay Payne, a Harvard Business School graduate, is a director at Clarion Partners. She was introduced to Clarion by Toigo back in 2003 and has held roles in both acquisitions and asset management within the firm and is currently the assistant portfolio manager of Clarion's closed-end fund investing in Mexico.

Leslie Hale, another Harvard graduate whose career spans 20 years in investment banking and real estate, is now CFO and senior vice president of real estate and finance at RLJ Lodging Trust. Leslie is intricately involved in the company's investment decision making, daily operations and long-term strategic planning, and oversees the execution of all asset and corporate level transactions.

These are just a few of the many impressive professionals Toigo has introduced to the industry.

What other programs does the Toigo Foundation offer?

The topic of diversity spans a variety of issues including the representation of diverse professionals on public, private and nonprofit boards. We know that institutional stakeholders have been vocal about the merits of and need for increased board diversity. Toigo has identified a meaningful way to participate in this agenda, by providing a way for under-represented professionals (inclusive of women) to present their professional skills and interests for a board. Our board diversity initiative, All A Board, includes an online tool that serves as a resource for public and private companies, nonprofits, search firms or nominating committees to identify potential candidates who may not be on their radar based on previous conventional channels. It's the only tool of its type that specifically features diverse, up-and-coming talent. We've also added a portal to this website that provides thought leadership and will eventually offer training sessions that will be available on a national basis.

In 2011, Toigo launched Groundbreakers, a program dedicated to fostering leadership and connections among women in finance. We featured noted philanthropists and investors like Jacqueline Novogratz from the Acumen Fund, as well as a dedicated session on women and governance co-moderated by CalPERS and CalSTRS. The summit is designed to complement other great programs in place today that focus on the interest of women leaders but incorporating unique program design and delivery that Toigo is known for.

As another pillar of support to MBA graduates, we designed a post-graduate fellowship model that allows students to enter into private equity through a 12-month rotation program, where the student spends six months with a private equity firm, three months with an operating company and then concludes their rotation with a three-month assignment with a pension fund. The program's success is rooted in Toigo's collaboration with industry professionals, both on the GP and LP front. This year students will be working with the State of Connecticut, Florida State Board of Administration and CalPERS. The goal of the program is to provide students with a 360-degree view of the private equity investment process — and a strong launch pad for a successful private equity career.

Toigo would like to design a program for real estate to launch in 2013 and welcomes conversations with firms interested in supporting the effort and building a focused fellowship that promotes greater entrée into real estate.

During the past two decades, how would you characterize or quantify the change in diversity in the finance world?

While there are undoubtedly markers of success with individuals and firms around diversity, there is still more work that can and should be done. If you look at the results of recent studies regarding diversity, articles or listen to ongoing concerns among colleagues, there still exists some of the issues that have been around for many years, and there still is a disproportionate number of unrepresented professionals — both minorities and women — in key decision-making roles. There are concerns about whether women and minorities are being marginalized through placement in non-revenue-generating positions, thereby limiting their potential for career growth and value creation. Growth of new business enterprises and access to capital of minority- or women-owned firms is also a concern. These issues are critical to Toigo alumni as they have a direct impact on career trajectories and success.

You've been with the Toigo Foundation for more than 10 years now, and I'm sure you've seen many heart-warming cases of generosity on the donor/mentor side and many wonderful success stories of your students. What do you find most rewarding about your work and the work of the foundation?

There have been many organizations and individuals that have been extremely generous to the Toigo Foundation with financial contribution, volunteerism as well as constructive partnership.

I report to an amazing board of directors who represent premier firms and leading investors. This group of collective talent and expertise is invaluable to me as they not only appreciate the mission and purpose of Toigo, they applaud our efforts to innovate and implement the types of new programs needed to develop more diverse business leaders.

The intellectual value derived from every person who has been engaged with Toigo has helped the organization grow and succeed. It is tremendously rewarding for me to see the wonderful success Toigo Fellows are enjoying in their finance careers and the energy and enthusiasm they display for their profession — and for Toigo. They have not lost sight of the founding work of Sue Toigo and the late Bob Toigo and the responsibilities they assume to be the best and give the best to their profession. They actively volunteer their time and expertise to current students, give financially to the organization and make us proud by the recognition and awards many receive for their professional contributions to finance. This affirms that my daily work has impact and value. When I began my career in finance, I started in real estate. I remain very passionate about fostering greater understanding and acceptance of diversity in this sector and promoting real estate as a career among our students in the program. I look forward to working further with the industry to expand perspectives and open doors to new talent to start their careers.

Most importantly, I have the pleasure of working with a smart, passionate, hard-working team, and we enjoy the work we do every day. ♦