

## Pyramid schemes help to alleviate Chicago unemployment

By BRANDON SMITH

Bars, movie theaters, grocery stores, pyramid schemes. Some businesses tend to weather economic downturns particularly well—but it's pyramid schemes that take more Chicagoans out of poverty and into prosperity, a new study finds.

According to a study that preferred to be unnamed for fear of retribution—pyramid schemes **have been known** to viciously pursue litigation—Chicagoans are beginning work with the schemes at ever-increasing rates.

The schemes confirm that they exist for the same reason any other business exists—to be "awesome" for their employees.

"I'm Hispanic and it's in our DNA to want to provide for our families," said Manuel Gonzales, an employee of a pyramid scheme whose leader is based in Chicago. "What I do allows me to do that, certainly monetarily and also with time. I only work 10 to 15 hours a week."

True to the pyramid schemes' word, a portion of those Chicagoans who reported they recently left unemployment also reported current salaries of several hundred thousand dollars. A small portion of that portion may be lying to gain recognition for their organization, **NBC's Dateline has found**, but how big that portion is remains unknown.

"What are your values?" Gonzales said. "Whatever they are, we help you keep them while working with us."

Pyramid schemes have not been rated by organizations that determine the social and environmental responsibility of companies, such as **Better World Shopper** and **GoodGuide**. This means, in fact, that such organizations have not rated pyramid schemes negatively.

Martha Johnson, an Irving Park resident, has enjoyed her time working for a Chicago pyramid scheme.

"I tried searching Craigslist for jobs," Johnson said. "I found a few Gold Coast residents who wanted to pay me \$25 an hour to do their shopping, but after I gave them all my information, they never got back with me. I figured it was probably a scam, so I decided to go with a pyramid scheme instead. Now I'll never have to worry about jobs or money again."

Scheme insiders say that rather than using impersonal means like Craigslist, they prefer recruiting employees in the traditional way—by prowling in corner coffee shops.

"We look for people who appear ambitious but unemployed," Gonzales said. "There are a lot of those nowadays. We're working to change that."