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## This Concord startup helps women get back into the workforce after a hiatus

BY SARA CASTELLANOS

In August 2011, Addie Swartz was driving on Route 128 when a couch fell off a truck and her Honda Pilot rammed into it at 65 miles per hour.

Her high school-aged daughter suffered a serious concussion in the accident, which led Swartz to put her successful career as an entrepreneur and principal of i-Consumer Associates on hold.

During that time, she realized how difficult it is for educated, career-oriented women to get back into the workforce after a break. That's what led Swartz to start her third business, Concord-based reachHIRE.

Founded in 2013, the startup helps prepare and place professional women back into the workforce after a career break, through an intensive, five-week curriculum program that costs about \$2,000. The company announced Friday a \$2.5 million round of venture funding to expand its impact beyond Greater Boston.

"I've always been focused on this opportunity to capitalize on talent and redeploy it in interesting and creative ways," said Swartz, who previously founded BrightIdeas educational software, acquired by a division of Pearson Education in 1996.

The program has placed women in roles ranging from business analysts and project managers to security architects and associate general counsels at companies including Cambridge-based Akamai Technologies (Nasdaq: AKAM), Boston-based Fidelity Investments and Marlborough-based Boston Scientific (NYSE: BSX).

Companies pay reachHIRE to help train and place women in the roles, and the startup also makes money through the fee for three curriculum tracks: business skills, professional skills and technical skills.

"What we offer companies is a turnkey solution for access to incredible talent that we've identified and vetted, and we're beginning to work with corporations to really customize what their needs are and attacking this problem of not enough women in companies," Swartz said.

The 100 largest publicly traded companies in Massachusetts made strides this year when it comes to women in key leadership roles, but reports show that the tech sector still lags for women on boards and in executive roles.

Out of the 28 technology companies analyzed in 2015 data from The Boston Club's annual census, 12.7 percent had women directors and 8.8 percent had women executive officers. Out of the 23 manufacturing companies, 12.3 percent of them had women directors, and 6.8 percent had executive officers.

The most recent funding for reachHIRE was led by a division of Cambridge-based LaunchCapital, and it will help the startup expand in Greater Boston, North Carolina and other undisclosed markets.

Bill McCullen, chief investment officer at LaunchCapital, said the firm invested in Swartz's startup to support its mission of creating more "systematic pathways" for women to re-enter the workforce.

"The market opportunity to help companies access the best talent available for critical job needs, while also diversifying their workforces, is vital to our economic growth," he said in a statement.



Addie Swartz