

NEWS

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Bergen's First Leadership Program Accomplishes Much

Class of 2009 Welcomes incoming Class of 2010 at Graduation Reception

Bergen County: The inaugural class of Bergen LEADS, Bergen County's first community leadership program, recently celebrated its "graduation" from the 10-month long curriculum at a reception at Bergen Community College, the site of the Bergen LEADS seminars. During the evening, the newly chosen Class of 2010 was introduced.

Bergen LEADS, sponsored by the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, is a program that focuses on preparing local leaders to tackle the unique challenges and embrace the opportunities in Bergen County.

The 2009 class of 28 participants, who live or work in Bergen County, was chosen through a competitive process in 2008. The group represents a cross section of industries, and a wide range of experiences, backgrounds, ethnicities and ages.

Under the guidance of former Bergen County Executive William "Pat" Schuber, the LEADS Seminar Director, participants are immersed in a stimulating curriculum that not only introduces them to topical issues of local importance, but also enables them to explore their leadership styles, enhance their leadership capacity and become meaningfully engaged in helping to solve some of the challenges facing Bergen County.

"Many of the problems of the current economy stem from issues with effective leadership," says Janet Sharma, the Center's executive director. "Consequently, a persistent question facing every sector is 'where will the next generation of strong,

ethical, effective leaders come from?’ Bergen LEADS helps provide the answer by preparing acknowledged and aspiring leaders to take the helm in the years ahead.”

Since September of 2008, the class has met monthly to dissect issues, debate viewpoints and get a first-hand look at Bergen County’s infrastructure. Using this newfound knowledge, members of the class are continually challenged to explore new approaches to community problems.

The first seminar examined Community and Government. The class met at the Bergen County Administration Building and learned about public service from County Executive Dennis McNerney and other elected officials. They were presented a primer on how to run for office by representatives of The Citizen’s Campaign (www.jointhecampaign.org), then broke into teams and visited several non-profit organizations that contract with government to provide services.

For the next session, the focus was on Education, with presentations by Dr. G. Jeremiah Ryan, president of Bergen Community College, and Dr. Aaron Graham, Executive Superintendent of Bergen County Schools. The class visited eight different schools to witness education options: public, private, religious, as well as Head Start sites.

Health care in Bergen County was next, focusing on the opening of Pascack Valley Hospital as an acute care facility. The class heard from key players in the debate, including Hackensack University Medical Center, Valley Hospital and Englewood Hospital, as well as local elected officials. The issue generated lively conversation, although there was no clear mandate. Class members then visited a variety of venues to see first hand how health care is delivered in Bergen County, including a government clinic, a hospital emergency room, a mental health center, and public and private long term care facilities.

Additional topics covered included Diversity in Bergen County and Law and Public Safety, with discussions on homeland security, law enforcement, and visits to learn first hand how such organizations as United Water, Garden State Plaza and the Police and Fire Academy are involved in measures to keep residents safe. Another timely topic was the Environment—with a panel that included developers and

representatives of environmental organizations, who addressed sprawl, open space, development and re- development. The class visited towns with downtown revitalization initiatives, the Meadowlands Commission, and Xanadu.

The seminar year concluded with presentation of special group projects and a graduation where the Bergen LEADS Class of 2009 welcomed the new Class of 2010.

The Bergen LEADS experience will not end with the seminar year. LEADS alumni will stay informed and connected through special alumni events, forums, and other networking vehicles.

William “Pat” Schuber, Bergen LEADS Seminar Director, sums up the program this way: “The future of Bergen County is being prepared now. Bergen LEADS is producing leaders who will take our businesses, non-profits and governments into a new era of strength and prosperity. Leadership makes the difference in whether our county meets the challenges it faces. Bergen LEADS is the organization that is providing the vision and training which will make that difference.”

Every month the 30 men and women of the of Bergen LEADS class of 2010 will meet to dissect issues, debate viewpoints and develop approaches to community problems. Every seminar day will begin and end at Bergen Community College.

“Bergen LEADS will help participants see the community – and themselves – through new eyes,” says Mrs. Sharma. “The curriculum is interactive, fast-paced and experiential. Field trips and site visits built into each seminar day will bring Bergen County to life.”

LEADS participants will meet with dynamic leaders with varying viewpoints as they debate topical issues of local importance. Woven throughout each seminar day will be exercises and experiences to help LEADS fellows better understand themselves as leaders – their motivations and strengths, as well as their own unique style.

The culmination of the Bergen LEADS experience is that, ultimately, the program will help participants figure out what to do with their newfound knowledge, both of Bergen County and of their own skills as leaders.

The members of the graduating class of Bergen LEADS 2009 are: Gary Albrecht, Ringwood; Kathleen Bikoff, Stillwater; Ria Bloss, Ridgewood; Pastor Rae Brown, Hackensack; Kimberly Caesar, Hackensack; Eric Cawood, Park Ridge; Tod Christianson,

Fair Lawn; Mary Connolly, Ramsey; Donna Corrieri, Hewitt; Liz Corsini, Englewood; David Dubin, Haworth; Richard Garcia, Saddle Brook; Marion Gregg-Whited, Teaneck, Mark Heard, Hackensack; Mary Hudson, Tenafly; Laura Kelly, Oradell; Paul Koretz, Rochelle Park; Tony Luciano, East Hanover; JoAnn Mathews, Carlstadt; Tanya Mayer, Montvale; Sanetta Ponton, Englewood; Ellen Rafferty, Nanuet; Sebastian Rodriguez, Teaneck; Mary Rossettini, Montgomery; Treva Spencer-Dupree, Teaneck; Michael Stern, Ridgewood; Gretchen Viggiano, Glen Rock; Helen Wronski, Morris Plains.

For more information about Bergen LEADS, call 201-489-9454. ext. 119, or email amissey@bergenvolunteers.org.

The mission of the Volunteer Center of Bergen County is to strengthen the community by connecting people with opportunities to serve, operating model volunteer programs, building capacity for effective volunteering, and participating in strategic partnerships that meet community needs.

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CAPTION:

The 2009 graduating class of Bergen LEADS, Bergen County's first leadership program sponsored by the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, look forward to using their skills to affect positive change in the community.

