

THE COLUMN

News from
the Virginia Institute
of Government

Fall 2003



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

“... strong communities are basically places where the capacities of local residents are identified, valued, and used. Weak communities are places that fail, for whatever reason, to mobilize skills, capacities and talents of their residents.”¹

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More and more, localities across the country recognize the value of cultivating homegrown leadership. Informed citizens can assume effective roles in their communities in many ways — as board or committee members, as elected officials, or as participants in public deliberation. In Virginia, there are several efforts underway to motivate citizens to enter civic life and to prepare those who are ready to get involved. This issue of *The Column* highlights three of these efforts:

- Citizen Leadership Institutes — introduce citizens to the inner workings of local government in hopes of developing a pool of potential leaders to assume positions of responsibility within their governments. The towns of Smithfield and Blacksburg are just two of several Virginia localities that have established these institutes.
- LeadershipPlenty — trains local leaders to work together and take action on behalf of their communities. The Institute and Cooper Center are working with the Southern Growth Policies Board and Pew Partnership for Civic Change to implement LeadershipPlenty in Virginia and evaluate its effectiveness.
- Political Leadership Institutes — educate citizens considering running for public office or getting more involved in the political process. The Sorensen Institute, housed at the University of Virginia, hosts a Candidate Training Program for first-time candidates for office in Virginia. ▼

Citizen Leadership Institutes

Helping citizens do their job

Officials in Isle of Wight County have seen increased civic participation since holding their first Citizen Leadership Program in 1999. The town of Blacksburg hopes to see the same results after running its inaugural leadership program this year.

The Isle of Wight program focuses on teaching leadership skills and examining local-government structure and inter-governmental relationships. Peter Stephenson, Smithfield town manager, estimates that 75 percent of the program’s graduates have become active citizens, e.g., seeking seats on school boards and planning commissions. He observes, “Participants have gained a broader perspective of our community and are making a true difference here in Isle of Wight County.”

Classes are taught by local-, regional-, and state-government professionals, as well as by faculty of the Workforce Development team at Paul D. Camp Community College. In addition to attending monthly classes, students meet in small groups to work on problems affecting the county.

The first class attracted 20 participants; this year’s class reached the maximum limit of 30. Participants range in age from high school students to retirees. Classes are held one Friday each month for 10 months. Some scholarships are available for the \$750 program tuition.

The program is hosted by the Isle of

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¹ Kretzmann, John P. and John L. Mcknight. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Illinois: ACTA, 1993, pg. 13.



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THE COLUMN is published quarterly by the Virginia Institute of Government as a service to state and local government officials and professionals. The Institute is part of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia.

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Citizen Leadership Institutes

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Wight/Smithfield/Windsor Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with Isle of Wight County, the towns of Smithfield and Windsor, and Paul D. Camp Community College.

Blacksburg's Citizen Leadership Program, which graduated its first class on October 16, combines tours of government departments with classroom discussion led by department heads and their staffs. The six-week session begins with an introduction to the council/manager form of government and overview of the town's comprehensive plan.

Class size is limited to 11 in order to maximize interaction between students and instructors. Instructors are encouraged to keep lectures and PowerPoint presentations to a minimum.

According to Heather Browning, Blacksburg's community relations manager, the



program's goals are to "... educate citizens not typically involved with civic issues; to grow a knowledgeable pool of potential participants for the town's various boards, committees, and commissions; and to create an enjoyable and worthwhile experience for participants."

The Blacksburg program, which is offered at no cost to participants, is held once a year; classes meet one evening a week. This year's class had students ranging in age from 30-70. According to Browning, offering the free program enables the town to educate its citizens about local government, while giving them the tools they need to be more involved. She calls it a "win-win" situation.

★ ★ ★

Contacts: Peter Stephenson, Smithfield town manager; at 757-365-4200 or pstephen@co.smithfield.va.us; Heather Browning, Blacksburg community relations manager at 540-961-1199 or HBrowning@blacksburg.gov. ▼

LeadershipPlenty

Teaching citizens to lead

NANCY J.H. GANSNER

In September, 15 citizens from the city of Charlottesville and Albemarle County returned to the classroom to learn how to work collaboratively and take effective action on behalf of their communities.

These "students" are participants in LeadershipPlenty, a new program that teaches citizens the skills to lead volunteers and others in their local community-service programs. The program includes modules on conflict management, strategic planning, media relations, and partnership building. Classes meet twice a month through May.

"There is no shortage of citizens wanting to volunteer and help tackle community problems in this country," observes Suzanne Morse, executive director of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, the national organization spearheading LeadershipPlenty. "The challenge is to help those who want to make a difference more effectively direct those efforts. LeadershipPlenty gives these committed individuals the tools and skills they need."

LeadershipPlenty was established to help diverse groups, in large and small communities, work together and assess results. Its participants include *novice leaders* who want to learn to collaborate on common goals; *citizens from rural communities* who want to create a local leadership program; *college students* who want to be involved both on and off campus; *volunteer organizations* that want to maximize their impact; and *established leaders* who want to develop new skills and relationships.

Members of the inaugural class were nominated by government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses in the Charlottesville-Albemarle area. Other LeadershipPlenty programs are planned for the city of Martinsville and Henry and Patrick counties.

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The author is director of University Internship Programs at the University of Virginia. Contact her at 434-982-4770 or nancyg@virginia.edu. ▼



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Candidate Training Program

Learning to run — politics 101

SEAN T. O'BRIEN

Unless your name is Arnold Schwarzenegger, you probably could not become governor of the country's most populous state with no prior experience in elected politics and after announcing your candidacy less than two months before the election. Unless, of course, you had attended the Sorensen Institute's Candidate Training Program.

The Candidate Training Program (CTP) is designed to teach novice candidates for office in Virginia the strategy and mechanics of running successful *and* ethical campaigns. Classes, taught by political consultants and academic faculty, include

- developing campaign strategy
- polling
- fundraising
- election law
- dealing with the news media
- message development and delivery
- electronic campaigning
- field operations — organizing and recruiting volunteers
- advertising — direct mail, radio, TV, palm cards, handouts, phone banks.

A study of ethics is integral to each module.

The CTP is designed specifically for first-time candidates, is nonpartisan, and classes are presented with an emphasis on ethical considerations. Many of the program's 123 graduates have been elected to offices ranging from a Soil and Water Conservation District to the House of Delegates. The CTP model has been duplicated in South Carolina, Georgia, and Ohio.

After completing the CTP in January 2002, Rob Schilling felt more confident about his upcoming race. "I am now far more prepared to approach my candidacy for City Council [Charlottesville] than when I entered the program on Friday morning. I believe the benefits of this program will certainly be borne out by more ethical campaigns throughout the Commonwealth and beyond." Schilling won his election.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

MARGARET MEAD
AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

"... more than a few Americans prefer to live the life of citizens ... some are happy to delegate to government agencies and major institutions as much of the task of managing their communities and the country as they can. Many others, however, want to live in communities, and a country, where citizens set the direction and do their fair share of the common work."

DAVID MATHEWS
CABINET SECRETARY, EDUCATOR,
ACTIVIST, AUTHOR, REFORMER

The 2004 CTP will be held February 6-8, in Charlottesville. The program is open to all Virginia residents who plan to run for elected office for the first time. The 3-day course costs \$250, which includes materials, lodging and meals. Scholarships are available and admissions are need-blind. The application deadline for the 2004 program is December 1, 2003.

The Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership was founded in 1993 by a bipartisan group of Virginians interested in improving



the quality of governance in the Commonwealth. Named for Thomas C. Sorensen, its chief benefactor, the Institute is funded by contributions from citizens and cor-

porations and grants from state and national foundations. The Institute is nonpartisan, nondiscriminatory, and does not participate in campaigns on behalf of candidates or causes. It is part of the Cooper Center for Public Service.

Sorensen's flagship program is the Political Leadership Program, which is not limited to candidates. The 10-month program covers public policy, campaign skills, and ethics. Starting next year, the Institute will host summer programs on state government and politics for high school and college students.



Read more at www.sorenseninstitute.org. The author is deputy director of the Thomas C. Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership at the Cooper Center. Contact him at 434-982-4998 or stobrien@virginia.edu. ▼

PLEASE LET US KNOW

Are there other programs in Virginia with similar goals to those described in this issue?

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Wallerstein Scholarship

Application deadline is March 1, 2004

Applications will be available in January to those interested in applying for the 2004-05 Wallerstein Scholarship.

The Scholarship, awarded to one person annually, provides up to \$5,000 to either

• a **Student** with an interest in local government who has been accepted into a graduate or undergraduate program at the University of Virginia, University of Virginia's Wise campus or any of UVa's regional centers. Interest in local government can be demonstrated by past experience with internships, volunteering, or relevant research or by a brief essay defining an interest in local government.

or

• a **Fellow**, defined as a practitioner, who would like to undertake a significant research project within a higher education environment, and who has reached a point in his/her career with time to pursue a sustained

program of research. A **Fellow** can also be a retired practitioner or academician (in government or a related field) interested in pursuing research of potential benefit to Virginia local government.

The Wallerstein Scholarship was established in 1973 at the University of Virginia by a gift from Ruth C. and Morton L. Wallerstein to foster interest and research in Virginia local government. Several previous scholarship recipients hold policy-making and management positions in state and local government in Virginia.

Applications will be available through the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service and the Virginia Municipal League, the two organizations that administer the scholarship. The deadline for submitting applications is March 1, 2004.



Contact the Cooper Center at 804-371-0202 or wallerstein@virginia.edu or the Virginia Municipal League at 804-649-8471. ▼