

NEWS

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For immediate release
January 20, 2010

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Bergen's Civic Leadership Program Moves Into Third Year

Applicants Sought for Class of 2011

Bergen County: The Bergen LEADS Class of 2010 has reached the halfway mark in its 10-month curriculum. Bergen LEADS, sponsored by the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, is a civic leadership program that focuses on preparing local leaders to tackle the unique challenges and embrace the opportunities in Bergen County.

The 30 members of the Class of 2010 were chosen through a competitive process in 2009. 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.

Since the September Opening Retreat, 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 Issue Day seminar, in October, examined Community and Government. The class met at the Bergen County Administration Building and learned about elected public service from County Executive Dennis McNerney and other government officials, then broke into teams and visited several non-profit organizations that contract with government to provide services.

In November, the class examined Healthcare in Bergen County. Mike Maron, CEO of Holy Name Hospital, spoke at length about Healthcare Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century, followed by Hansel Asmar, director of the Bergen County Department of Health Services, who spoke about the public health response. Class members visited a variety of venues to see firsthand how healthcare is delivered in Bergen County, including a community hospital, a free-standing emergency room, a mental health center, a psychiatric hospital and two clinics serving low-income individuals.

In December, the focus was on Education, beginning with the documentary *The Cartel Movie*, by Bob Bowdon. Teams of class members visited seven different schools to witness education options: public, private, religious, and special needs, as well as a Head Start site. The day concluded with presentations by Dr. G. Jeremiah Ryan, president of Bergen Community College, and Mark Porto, principal of Hackensack High School.

Future topics include Diversity in Bergen County and Law and Public Safety, with discussions on homeland security, law enforcement, and visits to the Bergen County Jail and the Police and Fire Academy. Another timely topic will be Economic Development, with a look at affordable housing.

The seminar year will conclude on June 15 with a community forum and debate on regionalization vs. elimination of County government vs. maintaining the status quo, followed by the graduation of the Class of 2010 and the introduction of the Class of 2011.

Alumni of the program enjoy the Bergen LEADS experience well beyond the seminar year. Participation in ABL (Alumni of Bergen LEADS) enables them to 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 readied now. Bergen LEADS is

producing leaders who will take our businesses, non-profits and government entities 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.”

Bergen LEADS is now accepting applications for the Class of 2011, which begins in September 2010. The program seeks individuals from all ethnic, racial and socio-economic backgrounds who espouse different political, religious and social views for future classes. Visit www.bergenleads.org for more information. Applications for the Class of 2011 are due by April 2, 2010.

For more information on Bergen LEADS, contact Amanda Missey, Bergen LEADS Director, at 201-489-9454 x119 or amissey@bergenvolunteers.org

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