

# Beginnings of Leadership Oak Ridge

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 27, 2015)

I was a member of the 1998 Leadership Oak Ridge class. It was a turning point in my life. From that experience I began to look for opportunities to give back to my community through volunteer efforts. Prior to then, my focus had been on my family, my church and my job, with little time devoted to anything else.

My wife, Fanny, who has supported me in this effort can testify to the transition and the refocus of my time devoted to helping others through volunteerism. We are proud of what Leadership Oak Ridge began in our family.

The first thing I did after completing Leadership Oak Ridge was to become a Chaplain for the Oak Ridge Police Department. I continue in that role today.

But this transformation is not unique with us, many others experience similar changes in their lives as a result of leadership classes. They are one of the most effective tools available to a community to grow dedicated volunteers and community leaders. Leadership Oak Ridge and what has evolved into the Center for Leadership & Community Development is no exception. Leaders emerge from the current programs.

Leadership Oak Ridge had its beginning in the planning of the 1992, 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Oak Ridge. A "Committee of 50" was formed in 1983 with Lu Dunlap, Executive director of the Chamber of Commerce and John Haffey, an Oak Ridge Associated Universities employee among these early leaders seeking to make a difference through leadership.

While the planning for the 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Oak Ridge continued to gain momentum, the effort to form a leadership program transitioned from an original focus on existing leaders to a program that included emerging leaders. This was a key transition development and was initiated by Sue Anne Lewis, a 1985 graduate of the program and Tom Southard. In 1987, the initiative emerged as a non-profit agency under the leadership of Carol Smallridge.

For the next 21 years, Carol led what was recognized then and remains today one of the most successful leadership programs ever to have existed. Our program remains the fourth oldest leadership program in Tennessee.

She focused the program on concerns affecting this community, made it into a great way to meet new people, even a way to establish new businesses, focus on the preservation of our history and also a way to overcome old difficult issues that needed to be addressed.

Additionally, she expanded the focus of Leadership Oak Ridge to the regional and state level as Oak Ridge does not exist in a vacuum, but actually impacts much more than just East Tennessee. Carol was instrumental in helping to establish the East Tennessee Regional Leadership Association which continues to function effectively today and unites a 16 county East Tennessee region through its leadership program.

I am pleased to have also participated in ETRLA as a class member in 2000 and as a board member and chairman of the board of directors for a number of years. This program continues to thrive and routinely holds a class day in Oak Ridge, touring our various Oak Ridge National Laboratory and Y-12 National Security Complex sites, as well as the East Tennessee Technology Park.

Here is what Carol Smallridge has to say about her 21 years at the helm of Leadership Oak Ridge: "I look back through my 21 years with Leadership Oak Ridge with many smiles and great pride! The pride comes from seeing so many of my past Leadership students now in community leadership roles! Taking on Leadership Oak Ridge was like having another child—and I still refer to it many times as 'my baby.'

"Like birthing a child, the blueprint was laid out for me - I just loved and nourished it over the years until it was time to let it go so it could grow and flourish with more financial support. I hold near and dear the

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learning experiences shared with so many wonderful people! To have people come into the program as strangers, (many of whom knew little about the community), and introduce them to the many components that make this such a great community including the school system, arts, medical, non-profits, housing, government, economic and industrial development, etc., - exposing them to many opportunities for involvement and many times witnessing an 'A-HA' moment of unexpected interest - still excites me!

"I see on a daily basis the long lasting relationships that were formed and the networking opportunities that have helped many further their career. I had many dreams for "my baby"---mainly a Leadership Foundation umbrella under which would be offered many different types of Leadership programs; included would be a Youth Leadership Oak Ridge (I'm happy to know this has been started under the Chamber and is extremely successful).

"I know Leadership Oak Ridge will continue to flourish and I will continue to miss 'my baby;' but I retain the many relationships made and the experiences shared that have helped me be the person I am today. Long live Leadership Oak Ridge!

If you know Carol, you know that she poured her heart into the Leadership Oak Ridge program for those 21 years and continues to contribute to our community in various other ways such as serving personally on various boards of directors like the Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau, working in ALTRUSA, and assisting ADFAC with such programs as the Bill Wilcox Bow Tie Award...and many more activities too numerous to mention here. She is truly a community treasure!

I served on the board of directors of Leadership Oak Ridge and was the chairman for several years. It was a joy to lead that board and I was pleased to be the chairman as the transition took place that brought the program back to the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce where it has continued to expand and grow.

Next we will look at the transition from the stand alone program to the integrated Center for Leadership and Community Development.



Carol Smallridge shown here assisting the Lunch – 4 – Literacy event with enthusiastic leadership as she normally does when she volunteers for anything