

# From Leadership Oak Ridge to the Center for Leadership & Community Development

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 5, 2015)

After 21 years, the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce approached the Leadership Oak Ridge board of directors with ideas for an expanded scope for the program and to bring the program back under the auspices of the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce where it had actually begun as a part of the Committee of 50. This intrigued the board of Leadership Oak Ridge because we had been considering ways to expand the program and to increase funding for it, with little success.

The board, along with Carol, agreed it was time to consider new approaches only possible with increased funding and staffing. Since 2009, with a new format, new sponsors, extended programming and other enhancements, nearly 1,000 individuals have graduated from this newly designed Leadership Oak Ridge program.

The newly formed Center for Leadership & Community Development board of directors have worked to expand the scope of their influence in the community through bringing the Young Professionals of Oak Ridge into the center and creating a Youth Leadership Oak Ridge program.

In keeping with the tradition of Leadership Oak Ridge, graduates of the program continue to form the leadership of many of our community's various organizations.

Currently there are 10 recent Leadership Oak Ridge graduates serving on various City Council appointed boards or commissions including Land Bank, Recreation & Parks Advisory Board, Beer Permit Board, Convention & Visitors Center Board, Environmental Quality Advisory Board, and Planning Commission.

Dozens of recent graduates serve on community boards and organizations. Examples are the Children's Museum, the United Way, Aid for Distressed Families in Appalachian Counties, Trinity Out-Reach Center of Hope, Emory Valley Center, Boys & Girls Club of Oak Ridge, Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce and more.

The new United Way Executive Director (Naomi Asher) is a graduate of Leadership Oak Ridge.

Greta Ownby, Oak Ridge Chamber Executive Vice President and current Leadership Oak Ridge coordinator, said, "as a member of the team that selected Naomi to lead the United Way, there was the feel good moment when I looked around the table and realized that almost everyone was a Leadership Oak Ridge graduate and of all the candidates – a Leadership Oak Ridge graduate was selected for the position."

Since the Leadership Oak Ridge program began, each class has had a Class Project. This vital element of leadership has also been retained in the expanded program. The goal is for the class members to work together as a team to identify a need in the community.

In recent years, their efforts have resulted in renovated tennis courts at Girls Inc., supporting the Emory Valley Center capital campaign and remodeling rooms at the Boys & Girls Club of Oak Ridge.

If you are interested in participating in Leadership Oak Ridge, here is a link to information on the program: [http://www.orcc.org/leadership\\_growth/leadership\\_oak\\_ridge.aspx](http://www.orcc.org/leadership_growth/leadership_oak_ridge.aspx)

The Youth Leadership Oak Ridge program, gearing up for its sixth year was the 2009 class project. While originally organized to mirror the adult program, the Youth Leadership program has evolved to include more personal and leadership development in its curriculum.

One session entitled "You at 35" guides the students through an exercise of what they envision their life being like when they are 35 and then developing a plan on how to achieve that dream including education, family, career aspirations, and more. A testament to the program and how the teachers,

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students and parents believe in it is that individuals for the 30 openings each year are selected from a pool of more than 100 students! (Yvette Cantrell of Restoration Service Inc., leads this effort.)

Another class project with ongoing impact is the project of the 2014 class. They are re-invigorating an alumni program for Leadership Oak Ridge graduates. While an alumni program was in place a number of years ago, the initiative had recently been inactive. The 2014 class is leading an effort to organize mixers, gather data on past graduates and develop a long-term plan. (Kyle Lang, Jeff Cheek, Allison Hummel, and Christley Chambers lead this)

Young Professionals of Oak Ridge, a valuable part of the Center for Leadership & Community Development and a key element of leadership for our community's future, is focused on organizing social and educational activities to generate or expand professional and personal connections. The group leads several community events, most notably a Dog Walk to benefit the Oak Ridge Animal Shelter. (Aaron Holbrook leads this)

Leadercast is full day simulcast organized by the Center for Leadership & Community Development to provide leadership development and training. Leadercast features internationally known speakers from a wide range of disciplines including academia, business, faith and sports. Scheduled for Friday, May 8 at New Hope Center Leadercast promises to once again be a motivational and educational experience for attendees.

For information about Leadercast, here is a link to the program's web page:

<http://leadercast.com/location/oakridge>

Since 2009, what was Leadership Oak Ridge has expanded to form the Center for Leadership & Community Development. The center now includes, in addition to Leadership Oak Ridge, a Youth Leadership Oak Ridge program, the Young Professionals of Oak Ridge and the effort to reinvigorate an alumni program. These programs, along the annual Leadercast event, serve to address the various perceived needs for leadership and community development in our community.

Within the Center, each program area has an executive advisory council to determine programming. The oversight for all programs is handled by the Center for Leadership & Community Development's board of directors. All of these leadership related programs are managed by the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce through a memorandum of agreement.

One way to tell the success of leadership programs that is commonly used is testimonials. Here is one from our program: Darren Osborne, a recent graduate of Leadership Oak Ridge, said, "Leadership Oak Ridge introduced me to community leaders and key decision makers. It gave me an in depth look at some challenges that our city is facing."

Darren continued, "If I had not entered the program, I would have never considered becoming VP of the Executive Committee for United Way Anderson County or serve on the city's beer permit board. Although I was born in Oak Ridge, I learned so much more about Oak Ridge in nine months than in my 20+ years as a resident. When I tell people I am a Leadership Oak Ridge Graduate, they know without a doubt that I'm a qualified community leader."

Here are others who have demonstrated the value of Leadership Oak Ridge and who have gone on to serve our community: Eric Abelquist (ORAU) – United Way; Naomi Asher (CASA/United Way) – Parks & Recreation Board; Kyle Lang (NSPS) – East Tennessee Regional, organizer of the alumni effort; Connie Martin (Methodist Medical Center) – Children's Museum, Oak Ridge Chamber; John Eschenberg (UPF) – Emory Valley Center; Colin Colverson (DOE) – ADFAC, Land Bank, Recreation & Parks Advisory Board.

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Naomi Asher, another graduate of Leadership Oak Ridge, said, "Taking part in the Leadership Oak Ridge gave me new insight into our community. Even though I grew up here and have spent most of my adulthood back in the Oak Ridge community, I had not been exposed to many of the areas of the city governance and economic drivers that the Leadership Oak Ridge program exposed me to."

She continued, "Additionally, I met people who have become some of my closest friends; people I would never have crossed paths with otherwise. Both the business and personal contacts I made through this program are invaluable. After completing the Leadership Oak Ridge program, I applied to be on the advisory board for the Recreation and Parks Department and have loved getting more involved in an area of the city often taken for granted."

Yes, Leadership Oak Ridge is continuing to produce community leaders! And through allowing the chamber to bring the program back within its area of responsibility the Center for Leadership & Community Development is thriving and making substantial differences in many community organizations.



Darren Osborne, Leadership Oak Ridge graduate



Naomi Asher, Leadership Oak Ridge graduate

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Leadership Oak Ridge class photo with Governor Haslam