



Leadership Asheville

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Leadership Asheville's Class 27 Project Focus: Helping Shape Our Children And Youth

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – April 8, 2009

For close to three decades, Leadership Asheville's acclaimed program has built a strong tradition of leadership development and community involvement. Utilizing lectures, discussions, work groups and service projects; the participants explore a variety of topics, ranging from the environment to education, and from local government to economic development.

The class graduating this Spring 2009 has had the unique opportunity to focus on specific needs in the area of children and youth outreach. The 62-member class, the largest to date, was divided into teams of five -called Leadership Learning Teams. This team project structure is not unique to the program, however this year they were set to task on developing community projects that solely target the youth in our community.

An example of one such initiative is a team that partnered with the Mission Healthcare Foundation in an effort to develop and explore the sustainability of a youth-led community program. With oversight and mentoring from adults, youth take on the specific aim at making a difference toward to the world hunger crisis by packaging and shipping food products to hungry children both in Western North Carolina and around the globe. "This is a wonderful way to teach our youth about giving back as well as showing them the work at Mission Children's Hospital (where the packaging takes place) and introducing them to a wide range of health careers," explains Susan Mims, M.D., Medical Director of the Children's Hospital.

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Aligning with the international *Kids Against Hunger* program, the Leadership Asheville team and Mission Healthcare Foundation coordinate volunteers to assist in packaging a food product that consists of a fortified rice-soy chicken flavored casserole that includes seven dried vegetables and over twenty vitamins and minerals.

The food product was created by a team of Minneapolis-based food scientists to fight the affects of starvation and to help the human body to begin the process of recovery. By adding the contents of one bag of the packaged food to boiling water, six 1-cup meals can be made. Through the international program, millions of meals are delivered throughout the world. Specific to this regional initiative, over 21,000 meals have been prepared to date, with one-third of those distributed throughout Western NC with the assistance of Manna Food Bank.

Late this past February, the team launched the first wave toward starting this important on-going project. Since then, four sessions have been held with a combined 102 volunteers, and twenty more food-packing sessions are planned to be completed by the end of 2009. Leadership Asheville Executive Director, Gerry Goertz said, "This is just one of twelve teams that partnered with various community organizations on a youth-related project. I'm always amazed to see complete strangers come together to form strong, cohesive teams in such a short period of time, and all the while, providing an important service to the community."

A full listing of all class participants and projects are available for public view on the Leadership Asheville web site, www.leadershipasheville.org.

Established in 1982, Leadership Asheville has graduated more than 1000 representatives of the region's economic, service and governmental sectors. Drawing from profit and non-profit organizations, local government officials, private industry executives, university professors, stay-at-home parents, and school administrators, Leadership Asheville's graduate network covers a divers array of interests, opportunities and challenges inherent to the region. Applications for the 2009-2010 Class of Leadership Asheville will be available the beginning of May.

Please visit www.leadershipasheville.org or contact Executive Director, Gerry Goertz at ggoertz@leadershipasheville.org for additional information.

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