

# IQ REPORT

VOLUME 33/ NUMBER 8 AUGUST 2001

## CITIZEN ACADEMIES

**I**nformed citizens are a valuable resource for a community. They also make the local government's job easier. To inform citizens and to attract and train future community leaders, communities throughout the country are establishing citizen academies.

Open to citizens of all ages, occupations, and interests, citizen academies educate participants about their community's municipal services and programs. Participants learn how their local government works and what services it has to offer. Enrollees attend presentations prepared by the various municipal departments, tour neighborhood sites and facilities, and try their hand at various local government "jobs." Interactions with local government officials provide insight into the particular challenges they face.

This report presents the development, content, and administration of citizen academies in five different communities:

- Sarasota, Florida
- Troy, Michigan
- Watertown, New York
- Highland Park, Illinois
- Hickory, North Carolina



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# Sarasota County, Florida: Civics 101—A Citizens Academy

*This case study was contributed by Casey Pilon, community involvement coordinator, Sarasota County, Florida, (941) 364-4641, cpilon@co.sarasota.fl.us.*

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Sarasota County is a 583-square-mile coastal community of about 326,000 residents. Its residents tend to be affluent (it is the fourth-wealthiest county in Florida) and older: about 65 percent are over age 55. They are active and involved in their community; they have very strong opinions and generally know what they want when it comes to growth management, the arts, the environment, and so on. But as knowledgeable as these citizens are, they are not quite sure how to accomplish what they want. Since frustration with bureaucracy can generate a negative attitude toward government, an approach was needed to increase citizens' overall understanding of how government functions. Hence, "Civics 101—A Citizens Academy" was born.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

A primary goal of the Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners is to improve understanding, communication, and cooperation between local government and those it serves. One way to accomplish this is to provide educational opportunities to help the public become familiar with Sarasota County government—in other words, to provide a "toolbox" of information to help citizens navigate the complex system of government operations and services. In general, those citizens who come armed with information tend to be less frustrated with the [local government] process.

The county administrator had experience with just such an educational program in Clark County, Nevada, and suggested the creation of something similar in Sarasota County. The board of county commissioners, having adopted the philosophy of a "kinder, gentler establishment" with a new emphasis on the goals of public education, outreach, and community partnerships, wholeheartedly supported the project. The community involvement coordinator, whose institutional

knowledge was gained through six years of county employment and whose community perspective came from a seven-year tenure with the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, was selected to develop and implement the academy.

The first step was to gather information about existing programs. The community involvement coordinator not only obtained written materials and friendly advice from a variety of sources, such as Clark County, Nevada, but also participated personally in two local academies: Manatee County's Citizen Academy and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Citizens Law Enforcement Academy. From those two experiences, she got a good sense of what works in an academy program and what does not work.

The second step was putting together a team to help develop the program. Because Sarasota County government is divided into eight functional business centers—Administrative Services, Community Services, Development Services, Emergency Services, Environmental Services, Growth Management, Health and Human Services, and Public Works—the team was created logically out of that structure. Each business center developed its own segment of the academy program, with its staff members working under the guidance of the community involvement coordinator. The overall goal was to have a "hands-on" educational program that was both fun and interesting.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Sarasota County runs two academies a year, beginning in April and in September. The classes are held each Thursday evening from 6:00 to 9:00 for ten weeks at various county locations. A half-day Saturday bus tour is also available. Each class is limited to 25 students—in part because meeting facilities are limited in size, but more importantly because experience has shown that a smaller class tends to interact better. Participants submit applica-

## 2 Citizen Academies

tions and are selected on a first-come, first-served basis. When class capacity has been met, the excess applications are carried over to the next academy. Applications request the standard information, such as name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and employer name and address, but they also ask for the applicant's birthplace, length of time living in Sarasota County, interests and accomplishments, and expectations from the program. The academy is promoted by word-of-mouth (alumni are the biggest proponents), a video shown on the county's public access television channel, and the distribution of applications at all six libraries and in the lobby of the County Administration Center.

There is no cost to participants to attend. The program budget of \$3,000 is funded out of the general fund. Participants are given sapphire-blue knit shirts to wear to class each week; these polo-type shirts, which cost \$23 apiece, bear the county's historic tower logo and the words "Citizens Academy" on the front, and the county's Web site address is embroidered on the sleeve.

Staff learned very quickly that snacks are insufficient to hold the students until 9 p.m. since many participants come directly from work without eating. Thus, a light dinner is also provided each week at a cost of approximately \$100 per night. Menu items include pizza, supermarket deli, chicken wings or fingers, deviled eggs, veggie trays, wheel sandwiches, hoagies, taco wraps, lasagna, and salad. Decaf coffee, diet and regular Coke, Sprite, and bottled water (the most popular beverage) are provided. On a typical class night, students arrive 15 to 20 minutes before class and get something to eat, which they can take back to their seats when class begins. At break time, they are given cookies, cake, or some type of sweet.

**In general, those citizens who come armed with information tend to be less frustrated with the [local government] process.**

The program is designed to provide an overview of county government, keeping in mind that providing minute detail is impossible within the established three-hour time constraints. The number one comment on the evaluation sheets is "not enough time." Time is allocated each week for questions of a general interest to the class. Those of a specific or personal nature are written down and addressed separately or outside the structured class setting. Handouts are provided; some people read every word while others file the information away in their binders for future reference. It continues to be a challenge to determine how much information students need and can assimilate.

### PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Although the weekly sessions are flexible and continuously improving, a general format has developed,

which each business center has maintained. What follows is an abbreviated description of each of the ten weekly classes.

#### Week 1: "The Big Picture"

*Location:* County Administration Center training room.

This is orientation night, when the county administrator and the chairman of the board of county commissioners greet the class. The course outline is reviewed, general information about the county is given, and housekeeping rules are discussed. The knit shirts and three-ring, two-inch notebooks are distributed, and the notebooks are perused. Participants are each given one minute in which to state their name and tell where they are from, why they enrolled, and one memorable bit of information about themselves (e.g., one was an Olympic swimmer, another a World War II calendar pinup girl, someone else Ohio's teacher of the year). The evening's speakers are the constitutional officers: the property appraiser, tax collector, sheriff, supervisor of elections, and clerk of the court. This is a unique opportunity for citizens to meet their elected officials personally, and the officers themselves must attend: no substitutes are allowed! These officers are included in the academy to help participants learn the distinction in elected officials' roles.

#### Week 2: "HELP!!!"

*Presenter:* Emergency Services. *Location:* a portable classroom at the Fire Training Academy.

Speakers include the fire chief, lifeguard supervisor, and various fire personnel with expertise in different disciplines. The class tours the grounds and the firehouse, and the K-9 search-and-rescue volunteers and their dogs demonstrate how they work. This is followed by either a mock fire rescue exercise or, if available, a medical helicopter fly-in. Bay Flight arranges to schedule one of its required training exercises to coincide with the class meeting. This is done at no cost to the county, and the class is fascinated with the equipment. The food for the evening is special: firefighters brew up and serve a batch of their award-winning Firehouse Chili.

#### Week 3: "Water, Waste & Want"

*Presenter:* Environmental Services. *Location:* Bee Ridge Water Reclamation Facility.

A tour is conducted at 5:15 p.m., followed by dinner and regular class at 6:00. The tour is early so that the outside facility can be viewed during daylight. To help everyone hear the guide, a portable microphone was purchased. Class topics include information about water (supply, resources, costs, etc.), utilities, natural resources, solid waste, and Sarasota County's award-winning recycling program. Low-flow showerheads and tote bags made from recycled Coke bottles are given out as gifts.

**APPLICATION**

**Civics 101 – A Citizens Academy**

**April 2002 Class**

The Sarasota County Government Citizens Academy Program is a unique opportunity for citizens to learn about Sarasota County Government in order to foster a better understanding and working relationship between the two. The Citizens Academy requires a major time commitment on Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 p.m. for ten weeks.

(Please print or type)

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Business Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Employer Name & Address \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Place \_\_\_\_\_ Years Living in Sarasota County \_\_\_\_\_ Polo Shirt Size \_\_\_\_\_

Personal History – Please tell us about yourself, i.e. interests, accomplishments, community involvement, etc.

Are you a member of any County Advisory Board?  No  Yes If "yes", which board(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

Please list any civic, professional, business, religious, social, or other organizations in which you are a member. If new to Sarasota, you may include activities in your prior location.

Organization

Years as Member

Position Held

Briefly discuss what you hope to learn as a participant in the Citizens Academy Program and how you anticipate using the information? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you planning to attend all sessions?  Yes  No If no, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to: Casey Pilon, Community Involvement Coordinator  
Sarasota County Government  
P. O. Box 8  
Sarasota, FL 34230  
941/951-5294

Deadline:

"I hereby give my permission for Sarasota County to use any still photograph or video footage in which I may appear for whatever purpose(s) deemed appropriate. I do this voluntarily and with the understanding there is no remuneration."

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The Civility Code, Resolution No. 2001-009, as adopted by the Board of County Commissioners 1-9-01, shall apply to all class sessions and functions.

"Dedicated to Quality Service"

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### Week 4: “How Does Your County Grow”

*Presenter:* Growth Management. *Location:* County Administration Center training room and commission chambers.

Growth management staff provide short- and long-range planning overviews; information about Apoxsee, Sarasota County’s comprehensive plan; and the county’s growth management history and current plan. The class then stages a mock planning commission meeting that is based on a previously heard rezoning petition. Some members of the class play commissioners, and the rest speak to the rezoning issue as either opponents or proponents. A former chairman of the actual planning commission conducts the meeting. Because the class is held in the commission chambers, students truly get the feeling of “being on the other side of the fence.” Most comment that it is not as easy as it looks.

### Week 5: “How to Build Better Homes”

*Presenter:* Development Services. *Location:* Cattlemen Road Facility.

During the first half of this session, students learn about development services: building, planning, land development, etc. The second half consists of a hilarious “play” that the employees wrote, rehearsed, and perform in three scenes. The first scene depicts the building permit process, complete with a bumbling builder burdened with blueprints under his arm. He fills out the application, has his plans reviewed, pays his fees, etc. Scene two shows the inspection phase of the development. Using a dollhouse by way of illustration, an inspector talks about the things for which he inspects. The final scene is code enforcement. The dollhouse is used again, with all kinds of code infractions—for example, a horse and an abandoned car in the yard, a utility shed too close to the property line—placed around the property. A code enforcement official points out the violations. The skit provides a lot of information in a very entertaining format.

### Week 6: “Sarasota’s Playground”

*Presenter:* Community Services. *Location:* a recreation facility at a park in the middle of the county.

The evening begins with a half-hour bonding exercise: a sit-down dinner at which everyone has an opportunity to eat and converse with one another. After dinner, speakers present information about the library system, historical resources, parks and recreational programs, and cooperative extension services. The class is then split into two groups. One group takes a walking tour of the park and its facilities, including Paws Park, a doggie facility. The other group plays life-size Monopoly: teams of two toss large dice; walk off the prescribed number of spaces, which are taped to the floor; and answer a question in the category on which they have landed (e.g., parks, libraries, historical, or exten-

sion). This exercise reinforces the information they were given earlier in the evening during the lecture portion. If a team answers correctly, it receives play money. The team with the most money at the end wins a prize. The two groups then switch places and engage in the opposite activities.

### Tour: “Up Close and Personal”

The class takes a half-day, Saturday morning tour on a county bus from 9:00 until noon. As students board the bus, they are given survival bags, not unlike those given on airlines, which contain snacks, beverages, and “Keep Sarasota Beautiful” give-away plastic sunglasses. Some trading occurs (chips for Doritos, green sunglasses for yellow, etc.). Trivia questions are asked en route, and prizes are given out for correct answers. As county facilities are passed, interesting facts are related. Most participants are unaware of the vast number of county locations and facilities. Two walking-tour (as opposed to drive-by) destinations are scheduled: Florida House, an environmental learning center, and the Carlton Water Treatment Facility and adjacent nature preserve, located in the remote eastern section of the county. This latter tour includes all aspects of the water process, from pumping to purifying. Water and environmental conservation are two major issues in Sarasota County, so the interest in visiting these two facilities is keen.

### Week 7: “Stay Healthy and Safe”

*Presenter:* Health and Human Services. *Location:* Terrace Building.

This evening is always memorable, if for no other reason than the spectacular view of the city and bay from the tenth-floor perch in the Terrace Building. Students insist on ten minutes of free time to view the blazing sunset over the water. Staff present information on their multitude of programs, such as teen smoking, septic tank approval, contagious diseases, kid care, mosquito control, and vital statistics. The class also learns about grants and aids, social services, and veteran services. A game is played during this session, also. Each person is given a number. The instructor then describes a disease, which the class must guess. The participant who has that number has that disease. Although all the diseases described can be serious, some generate humor. For example, “This disease is contagious. The military shows movies about it and its prevention....” That one never takes long to guess.

### Week 8: “Roads, Roads and More Roads?”

*Presenter:* Public Works. *Location:* Potter Building, Sarasota County Fair Grounds.

Public works staff go all-out for this mini-expo and generally receive the highest ratings overall for their effort. Individual displays at various stations, such as forestry, sign shop, and area transit bus, are set up in a large room. The class is split into five groups and ro-

tates among the exhibits, where staff explain the function of each exhibit and entertain questions. The entire group then has the opportunity to go outside and operate large equipment, such as bulldozers and menzi muckers (climbing hoe excavators). Students can ride up in a bucket truck or sit in an airboat while the engines rage. The academy piggybacks on an already existing annual expo conducted during the day for employees and their families as well as for vendors.

### Week 9: “Money and Not-So-Cheap Talk”

*Presenter:* Administrative Services. *Location:* County Administration Center, third floor television studio.

Students receive an overview of administrative services as well as a 15-minute presentation about the operating and capital budgets and their related processes. An analyst from the budget team initiates a budget exercise, in which each class member becomes a commissioner who listens to five different requests for funding. The five requests are all presented by the analyst: First she dons a baseball cap, clutches her skateboard, and becomes a kid asking the commission to fund a skateboard park; next she becomes an elderly citizen who needs the commission to fund expanded bus routes. After all five presentations, the “commissioners” work in groups of five to allocate the available funds, which are insufficient to fund everything fully. The group dynamics are very interesting. After 20 minutes the commissioners report on how and why they allocated the funds. Then, after a 10-minute break, staff emerge dressed in 1970s attire to set the mood of a former era, and the class prepares to play the game, “In Line/On Line.” Each participant is handed a written question to ask of the receptionist; the receptionist then directs that person to another staff person, who may send the participant to even a third person. After 10 minutes of confusion and frustration, everyone is seated. The county’s webmaster shows the students how they could have found their answers very easily by navigating the county’s Web site. About 90 percent of the group have e-mail addresses and are generally computer savvy. Finally, public communications presents an overview of its responsibilities and of Access 19, the county’s public access television channel. Not surprisingly, boxes of popcorn complement the presentation.

### Week 10: “Bits and Pieces”

*Presenter:* 911 Center, Emergency Services, County Attorney. *Location:* Emergency Operations Center.

This evening is left unstructured, with the subject matter to be determined by the class. People may request more information on a subject already covered

or a presentation on a subject not covered; they may choose to discuss hot topics, or they may leave the choice up to the coordinator. To date, groups have toured Sarasota’s recently restored historic courthouse and the criminal justice building. They have heard a presentation from the county attorney and toured the 911 call center (always popular). They are given information on how to get involved with volunteering and advisory boards. It is pretty much a wrap-up evening.

### Graduation

Graduation is scheduled for the next board meeting after the final class. Within this 10-minute “ceremony,” the chairman of the board of county commissioners presents the graduates with a certificate of completion as the coordinator tells a short story about each of them. Graduates are also given a 5- to 10-minute video, edited from footage of their experiences taken each week by a student intern.

### SUMMARY

Subjectively speaking, the Citizens Academy is a huge success. Each class is filled with people who have been on the waiting list to enroll. Graduates tout the benefits of their experience and recommend the program to their friends and family. From their comments on their weekly evaluation sheets, it is apparent that they have come to feel more aware of and knowledgeable about county government structure and process.

Objectively, however, although some indicators of success can be measured (e.g., how many have gone through the program? to what extent has their level of knowledge increased?), the real goal is to help participants put their knowledge to use to improve their experiences and interactions with Sarasota County government in the future. Follow-up questionnaires will be sent to graduates to determine the program’s success in meeting this long-term goal.

The Citizens Academy is a wonderful outreach learning opportunity, adaptable to any circumstance in all jurisdictions. For anyone developing such a program, the challenge is to provide information in an interesting and fun manner, to tailor it to the specific community, and to ensure that an adequate budget is available to deliver the goods. Clearly, elected officials as well as management must be supportive if the program is to succeed.

There is an old family saying that goes, “You can serve plain ole sandwiches out of a cardboard box or on a doily-covered tray; how you do it *does* make a difference!”

## Troy, Michigan: Citizens Academy

*This article was contributed by John Szerlag, city manager, (248) 524-3330, johnszerlag@ci.troy.mi.us, and Cindy Stewart, community affairs director, (248) 524-1147, stewartca@ci.troy.mi.us, both of Troy, Michigan.*

### PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Troy is a progressive city in Oakland County, Michigan, with a residential population of 80,959. Within its 34.3-square-mile area, the city has both new housing and apartments at a variety of price levels as well as mature neighborhoods. Troy also has an employment population that exceeds 120,000, and vacancies in Troy's office and industrial buildings are nearly nonexistent. Among the city's more than 5,000 businesses are many corporate headquarters, including Flagstar Bank, Kmart, Delphi Automotive, EDS, and Kelly Services.

Troy believes that the success of its programs and projects depends on citizen input and support. However, since the same minority of citizens seemed to get involved in many projects, the city was interested when a former citizen employee reported on a citizens academy in nearby Linden, Michigan. Troy had successfully conducted its own citizens police academy for the first time, and the idea of reaching out to a new audience of residents seemed quite promising. The goal was to develop a group of better informed citizens, who would take what they learned firsthand about the city of Troy and tell their neighbors and their homeowners associations so that more people could take advantage of the city's services.

### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The Citizens Academy had its inception with a meeting of the city manager and the department directors. All were requested to submit information about their specific departments that would be of interest to Troy residents. The community affairs department was assigned to coordinate the project and the application process. It proceeded by compiling departmental information into a course outline, curriculum, and schedule.

The program was announced in the Spring 2001 *Troy Today*, the quarterly newsletter that is mailed to all homes in Troy, and press releases were sent out to the local news media. An application was included in the *Troy Today* announcement section (see sidebar on page 7).

Of the 30 people who applied, 16 were chosen for the inaugural academy. The participants reflected a representative cross-section of citizens—men and women; professionals, homemakers, and laborers; new and life-long residents—all of whom shared an interest in becoming better informed about how their city works.

Some participants had previous community involvement whereas others had none. Their expectations from the program included becoming better acquainted with the city and its programs and services, learning about the policies and procedures of city government, meeting new people, finding useful ways to volunteer in the community, and encouraging others to get involved. One participant expressed an interest in running for a position in city government in the future; another has become the "answer man" for his neighborhood and felt that the information he learned at the academy would also benefit his neighbors.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The program is an eight-week course that is designed to teach citizens about the city of Troy and the services it provides. It is led by the city manager, community affairs director, and departmental directors. The goal is to conduct two courses a year for 15 to 20 citizens per session. Citizens learn about their city's government and meet with city management personnel. Participants are then encouraged to share the knowledge they receive from the program with their neighbors and family members.

The Citizens Academy is funded through the community affairs department budget. Costs include binders, copies of handouts, shirts, hats, and weekly dinners. There is no cost to the residents who attend the sessions, but they must be willing to commit the time to attend all eight sessions.

As the academy is designed, each department director or his or her designee attends one session and provides the presentation materials. Classroom sessions cover the finance division (assessment, treasurer, purchasing, information technology) and service division (building, engineering, planning, real estate and development, city clerk, and risk management). Site visits include trips to the public works, police, and fire departments; the library and the Troy City Museum (two separate sites on the same trip); and parks and recreational areas. Participants enjoy hands-on activities and live demonstrations by city personnel, who in turn benefit from questions posed by students: the participants serve as a focus group, and the questions they ask and interests they express provide a useful sample of the issues that concern the residents of Troy.

At the end of each weekly session, participants review what they have learned and are then asked to evaluate that evening's presentation (see sidebar on page 8).



**Troy Citizens Academy Application Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Employment: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I am a resident of the City of Troy:  Yes  No

Number of years as Troy resident: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Briefly state why you are interested and wish to participate in the Troy Citizens Academy. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you had any prior experience in City government, such as serving on a Board or Commission?  Yes  No

If yes, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Will you be available Thursday evenings from March 22 through May 17, from 6:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m.?  Yes  No

4. Please describe your present and past community involvement; i.e., voluntary, social, business, professional and the scope of your responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What are your expectations from this program? \_\_\_\_\_

Please return your application quickly, as class size is limited. All participants in the Troy Citizens Academy are encouraged to attend all of the sessions. Unless otherwise noted, all sessions are from 6 to 9:00 p.m. and will be held in the Lower Level Conference Room at Troy City Hall, 1st floor.

Their evaluations will be essential tools for refining the content of future Citizen Academy courses. At the end of the program, a graduation ceremony is held before the regular city council meeting to recognize the participants. The first Citizens Academy graduation was cablecast live on the city’s government channel.

**PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

The 2001 Troy Citizens Academy started on Thursday, March 22. With a few exceptions, sessions were held every Thursday from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. Participants were asked to report to a conference room in the city hall at 5:30 p.m. for dinner (pizza, snacks, pop, and coffee) before the start of class. For any sessions held at an off-site location, participants met at city hall and bus transportation was provided. The following overview presents a brief description of each of the eight sessions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Much of this description has been supplemented by Annette Kingsbury, “Citizens Academy Proves an Interesting Experience,” *The Observer & Eccentric*, 3 May 2001, (T)A3.

**Week 1: Introduction/City of Troy as an Organization**

*Location:* City Hall.

The first session welcomed the participants and gave them personalized binders with labeled dividers for the three-hole punched handouts that would be distributed with each presentation as the course progressed. The binder also contained a city calendar, a copy of the current city newsletter, a service directory, and an academy syllabus.

The session then gave participants an overview of the Citizens Academy, a brief history of Troy, and a summary of Troy’s form of government. It covered the city’s goals and objectives, and gave participants some insight into the role of advisory boards and committees and the function of various city departments. Students learned that it cost \$23 million to widen one mile of city road last year and that the Michigan Department of Transportation plays a major role in city road matters. Participants were also made acquainted with the city attorney’s office (including legal advice, legal documents, civil litigation, prosecution, and levels of offenses); the

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### Troy Citizens Academy Evaluation

#### Introduction/City of Troy as an Organization—March 22

Since this is our inaugural program, your feedback would be greatly appreciated.

Please rate the following on a scale of 1 – 10 (1 = poor & 10 = excellent)

Overall session \_\_\_\_\_

Content \_\_\_\_\_

What information did you find most useful? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What topic would you like more information about? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What information did you find least useful? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you learn anything new this evening?  Yes  No

Do you have any suggestions to make tonight's session better? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name: (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

human resources department (presenting “fast facts” about the employee population, departmental budget, number of job applications processed annually, and city’s turnover rate, as well as information on recruitment, salary administration, labor relations, and education and training); and the community affairs department, which outlined key objectives and critical success factors and used a slide presentation to provide examples of departmental responsibilities and activities.

#### Week 2: Finance Administration

*Location:* City Hall.

Among other things, participants learned how property assessments are calculated; how tax rolls are prepared and settled; how funds are collected and dis-

bursed; and how such issues as freedom of information, purchasing, and information technology apply to local government. A significant amount of time was dedicated to the budget process, and staff provided participants with an outline of the fiscal year calendar. Discussion also covered the role of the clerk’s office vis-à-vis such things as birth and death certificates and voter registration/elections, complemented by a demonstration of how a voting machine works.

#### Week 3: Planning/Real Estate & Development/Engineering/Building

*Location:* City Hall.

The third session focused on local government planning issues, such as economic development; the

city's master plan; property acquisition, management, and maintenance; permits; the board of zoning appeals; nuisance abatement; and traffic engineering. Participants were also introduced to some of the advanced software the city has to facilitate its planning functions. The planning department distributed a number of informative documents, including a list of subdivision developers; real estate and development provided question-and-answer handouts about property acquisition and facts about the use of metric measurement with right-of-way acquisition; and the engineering department provided several maps and a chart of major road construction projects.

#### **Week 4: Infrastructure—Public Works**

*Location:* Public Works Building.

This site visit to the public works department touched on a number of topics, including stormwater management, water and sanitary sewers, water billing, and refuse and recycling. Participants were shown the salt dome, where the city stores millions of pounds of road salt; the making of computer-generated street signs; and the tapping of a water line in a matter of minutes. They were then taken to Troy's fleet maintenance garage, where each participant received a unique souvenir: a street sign featuring his or her last name. Participants were also provided with a variety of documents, such as a fact sheet about water, snow and ice control procedures (including plowing maps), recycling instructions, and a citizen's guide to wetlands.

#### **Week 5: Parks and Recreation**

*Location:* The community center, followed by a bus tour to numerous recreational sites.

After a bus ride that was made all the more special by hot chocolate-chip cookies baked just for the class (compliments of Camp Ticonderoga restaurant, a privately run restaurant on the golf course), participants were given a tour of community center facilities and learned about programming, funding, and future plans. In a presentation that included sketches, maps, and a time line, they also learned about the development of the new community center building. Other site visits included the aquatic center, the nature center, the tennis bubble, Troy farm, community parks, existing and future golf course sites, and Camp Ticonderoga restaurant. Parks and recreation provided logo-inscribed Frisbees and golf tees as souvenirs as well as a copy of the senior citizen newsletter.

#### **Week 6: Library/Museum**

*Location:* Troy Public Library and the Troy City Museum.

Participants were given a formal tour of the Troy Public Library, including an overview of current and future renovations, technology elements, and the children's section, and they each received a coupon for

the Friends of the Library gift shop. Following that, participants took a bus to the Troy City Museum. The goal for this part of the session was twofold: to provide a sense of Troy's history as a community, and to provide an overview of the museum's development and role in preserving that history. Highlights of the museum tour included a tour of the Township Hall building (built in 1929); a visit to the archives (an area not typically open to the public); and a history lesson presented in the old schoolhouse, where participants sat at old-fashioned desks and one even sat on a corner stool wearing a dunce hat. Souvenirs from this session were homemade candles.

#### **Week 7: Public Safety I—Police**

*Location:* City Hall.

In this session participants learned about the police department's role in city government and about issues in police work. The presentation included historical facts, such as the names of the first police chief and officer, and quick facts, such as the number of calls for service in the previous year, the number of arrests, and the number of traffic accidents investigated. Those sections of the city's charter and ordinance that pertain to the police department were also cited. Participants toured the police department facility, visiting such areas as the communications dispatch center, the lock-up, and the firing range.

#### **Week 8: Public Safety II—Fire**

*Location:* Troy Fire Department.

For this last session, participants toured the fire department and learned about its operations and fire prevention education. The class was divided into groups of four and made the rounds of four stations. At the first station, participants experienced what it was like to be in a bucket ladder. At the next, two participants donned complete fire gear, including SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus), and entered a smoke-filled room, where they tried to locate a body using an infrared camera. At the third station, participants rode in a fire truck. And at the last station, they tried their hand at using the "jaws of life" and a water hose.

#### **Graduation**

Following a dessert reception attended by graduates and their families, the governing body, and city staff, a graduation ceremony was held at the beginning of a city council meeting. During the ceremony, which was televised live, graduates received a diploma certificate, a polo shirt with the city logo, and a hat. A class photo was taken, which was featured in the subsequent edition of *Troy Today*. Presented along with general information and an academy application, the photo served to publicize recruitment for the next class of the Troy Citizens Academy.

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### SUMMARY

The inaugural Citizens Academy was deemed a tremendous success by all involved. Participants found the experience of meeting with city department heads and learning how the city works to be, in the words of one student, “totally rewarding.” They also delighted in the camaraderie that developed. And city staff recognized how much the academy can benefit the city, with more and more citizens becoming familiar with their local government and the services it makes available to them, and with city employees learning about

each other’s departments as well. One result may be improvements to the level of service in some areas of city government.

The Citizens Academy fosters both an awareness and an understanding of city procedures and programs, and charges its graduates with the responsibility of sharing what they have learned with family, friends, and neighbors. The goal is for all participants to gain a better appreciation of the partnership between citizens and local government, which is crucial for any community’s success.

## Watertown, New York: Jefferson Leadership Institute

*This case study was contributed by Karen Delmonico, president and chief executive officer, Greater Watertown Chamber of Commerce and Jefferson Leadership Institute, (315) 788-4400, karen@watertownny.com.*

### PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Jefferson Leadership Institute in Watertown, New York, is an annual leadership development program that immerses participants in community issues through 10 full-day sessions over a 10-month period. The program was formulated in 1991, when a number of community leaders realized that the same few people were serving on many boards and that major community decisions were being made by a very small group of people. Recognizing that the future of the Jefferson County area is directly linked to the quality of its leadership and that dedicated, trained, and motivated community leaders shape and determine the future of any region, the “founders” decided that a program was needed to teach and cultivate new community leaders and to help move those new leaders into important positions within the community. The curriculum enables participants to develop their leadership capabilities and build strong relationships, and it encourages citizen involvement to effect positive change in the community.

### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The institute was modeled after several existing leadership programs and has been modified over the years

to best suit the specific needs of Jefferson County. It is organized and coordinated by the Greater Watertown Chamber of Commerce, a well-respected, countywide business association, with staff specifically dedicated to the program’s implementation. Throughout the year, participants learn critical skills, such as collaborating, visioning, consensus building, and creative problem solving, all of which are crucial for addressing the needs of the community.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The program is promoted in a number of ways, including a direct mail to all graduates and their sponsors, advertising in the chamber of commerce’s newsletter, press releases to all media (television, newspaper, and radio), and personal appearances by the chamber president on television. The majority of applicants come from alumni referrals and from several businesses and organizations that consistently support the program by sending candidates annually.

Each year, 20 participants for the institute are selected from written applications designed to reveal their commitment and motivation to serve the Jefferson County area. Such commitment and motivation are demonstrated by their willingness to take

on volunteer or appointed leadership roles, their ability to set and achieve personal goals, and, ideally, some experience in community activities that indicates their potential to shape policy and exert significant influence over critical issues facing the community. Participants, who tend to reflect the diversity of the area's communities, include small business owners, public servants, corporate executives, nonprofit and social service agency professionals, the faith community, and the community at large. The breadth and relevancy of the curriculum provide a valuable experience for both newcomers and long-time members of the community alike.

The chamber of commerce and its advisory committee select the class facilitators, each of whom is an expert in the featured topic. Facilitators might include the president of the local college, the director of the hospital, the executive officer of the county's economic development agency, and so on. Each facilitator is free to define the curriculum for his or her own session and to bring in other experts to speak, and all facilitators get total administrative support from the chamber. They are not paid, but they are recognized for their contribution to the program at the graduation dinner that is held at the end of the class year.

The chamber keeps a record of the graduates' involvement in the community, whether as volunteers, members of a board of directors, or public servants. Names are referred to organizations upon request with the permission of the alumni, taking into consideration their special interests. Just recently the alumni discussed the possibility of holding an annual luncheon with speakers to keep the group motivated, interested, and involved in the community.

The fee for participants is \$775, with some limited scholarship funding available. The tuition is used to pay for marketing and for the general costs involved with implementing the program, including accommodations at the overnight opening retreat, the kick-off and graduation dinners, speakers, lunches, transportation, supplies, and administration. The financial management of the institute is all done through the chamber of commerce.

## PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Below is a brief description of the 2000–2001 curriculum:

### Opening Retreat

The curriculum began with an overnight retreat, where the new class had the opportunity to get to know each other and to learn about the concepts of group dynamics and individual leadership skills within a group setting. Individually and in teams, the participants explored perceptions of their community, its people, and its future, and began to learn how important volunteerism is to the health of a community.

### Session 1: History: How Did Today's Community Evolve?

What better way to begin to understand how and why Jefferson County is what it is today than with an overview of its history? In the second session, students learned about the early settlers, the important leaders, the county's role in the War of 1812, the significance of the Black River, the importance of forestry and agriculture to the region, and more. The day included presentations and discussions with local historians, a tour of some of the county's most significant historic sites, and a visit to the Jefferson County Historical Society.

### Session 2: Business and the Economy—Today and Tomorrow

The focus for the day was on the viability of and vision for Jefferson County's economy. Economic development specialists led the discussion, which also addressed the opportunities available to county residents, the steps that are taken to attract and retain businesses, and the challenges faced by the region. In keeping with the emphasis on business, industry, and agriculture, participants toured a local manufacturer and agribusiness.

### Session 3: Communications in the 21st Century: The Media and Telecommunications

Beginning with a panel discussion by local media leaders, the morning session looked at the role of the media in the community: what they contribute; what their obligation is to the community; what the future looks like for television, newspaper, and radio; and what challenges they face in the future. The class also learned how nonprofits, businesses, agencies, and individuals can work more effectively with the media. The afternoon session addressed how the Internet, e-mail, and e-commerce are changing our lives and the way we communicate.

### Session 4: An Inside Look at Government

This session explored the role and structure of village, town, city, county, and state government, including the legislatures, the courts, and law enforcement. It also covered some of the many challenges faced by each branch of our system of government. Part of the afternoon was spent in a mock legislative session, where participants learned what it is actually like to come to consensus and pass tough legislation.

### Session 5: Health Care in Jefferson County

Half of this day was spent reviewing and discussing the health care system in Jefferson County. Beginning with an introduction to outpatient care, the discussion continued with hospital and other medical services as well as specialized outpatient services (including adult

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homes, assisted living, and long-term care). Representatives from the leading hospitals, mental health services, the Health Care Alliance, and other health-related agencies discussed available services and trends in medical care. The rest of the session, led by a panel of key health care professionals, was devoted to critical issues in health care, including staffing, finances, and regulatory requirements.

### **Session 6: Education and Life-Long Learning: The Cornerstone of a Healthy Community**

During the morning session, the class learned about the educational system in Jefferson County from kindergarten through college. A panel of leading educators led the presentation and discussion, which covered such topics as home schooling, charter schools, and the challenges facing educators in today's competitive and changing economic climate. The afternoon session focused on lifetime learning and the new technologies that have created previously unheard-of opportunities for education, including distance learning, interactive teleconferencing classrooms, online courses, and virtual seminars.

### **Session 7: Nonprofits—Important Assets to Jefferson County**

With the focus of the session on the nonprofit agencies and organizations in Jefferson County, participants learned about how nonprofits work, what nonprofits mean to a healthy community, what threatens their successful continuation, and how class members can help as individuals to keep the system strong. Representatives of many of the area's nonprofit organizations were on hand to discuss their programs and provide a panel presentation and roundtable discussions for further understanding. Class members were able to identify organizations that they were interested in supporting.

### **Session 8: Fort Drum: An Important Part of Our Community**

The day began with an informal welcome session hosted by the garrison commander of Fort Drum, who outlined the demographics, economic impact, and overall mission of this U.S. Army facility. The class spent the rest of the day visiting various post facilities

to see soldiers, civilian employees, reserve components, and other members of the post community in action. During the lunch break, representatives from the Fort Drum Regional Liaison Organization and the local chapter of the Association of the United States Army discussed their important roles in support of the military community.

### **Session 9: Tourism and Natural Resources**

On this day the class visited some of the significant tourist attractions in Jefferson County, including the Tug Hill region and sites on the St. Lawrence River, the Black River, and Lake Ontario. Speakers from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation were also on hand to discuss their roles in the tourism industry. Participants met business owners involved in tourism and took part in a lively discussion about the opportunities and challenges facing the tourism industry in the county and surrounding region.

### **Session 10: Board or Bored? Leadership Development**

This session focused on some of the skills needed to be an effective leader, including public speaking, listening skills, board participation in management, financial responsibilities, and parliamentary procedures. Students took part in a mock board meeting in which they had to resolve a realistic issue. The afternoon session focused on leadership traits and resources. Real community issues were introduced, and participants applied their leadership skills in problem solving.

## **SUMMARY**

The Jefferson Leadership Institute is a very important development program, both in Jefferson County and for the Greater Watertown Chamber of Commerce. Since its inception, it has created a base of new leaders for the community to draw from for all levels of service. The information and community overview that the program provides is sufficient to make every graduate—whether in service as a volunteer, a board director, or a public official—a knowledgeable and valuable member of the community.

## Highland Park, Illinois: Citizen University

*This case study was contributed by Nelsie Smith, administrative intern in the city manager's office. For additional information, readers should contact Sean McBride, assistant to the city manager, (847) 926-1005, [smcbride@cityhpil.com](mailto:smcbride@cityhpil.com).*

### PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

Highland Park, Illinois, is an affluent North Shore suburb of Chicago. The city implemented a Citizen University in spring 2001 to offer residents an opportunity to learn more about municipal government issues and services. Specifically, the goals of the university were to provide residents with a better understanding of the city's municipal services, the council-manager form of government, and the challenges local governments face; to encourage active and frequent participation in local government; to develop a pool of residents for the city's appointed and elected positions who are knowledgeable about Highland Park's governmental organization; and to foster dialogue, good relations, and communication between residents and city officials. All residents were invited to attend, and the event was publicized on the city's public access channel and in the community newsletter.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND SCHEDULE

The assistant to the city manager was responsible for the initiation and coordination of the Citizen University. There was no fee for participating. Funds were budgeted for the event out of the city's general fund, but the cost was minimal and included photocopying for the binders that the students were given at the first session, advertisement brochures, and refreshments.

Class size was originally limited to 30 students, but 36 people applied and were accepted with an average of 25 attending each session (although it was not always the same group of people). Participants reflected an almost perfect mix of residents, with approximately half under the age of 50 and half over that age. Several attendees were already quite involved in community affairs; the rest tended to be longtime residents who were just curious about how local government works.

The program was divided into three sessions, which met on three consecutive Thursdays from 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. The binder that the students received included handouts, PowerPoint slides, biographies of the speakers for each session, and a quiz put together by the corporation counsel to identify typical misconceptions that people have of municipal government, parliamentary procedures, and so on (see sidebar on

page 14). Within each two-and-a-half-hour session, speakers were allotted 25 minutes apiece, including questions and answers, and participants enjoyed a 10-minute break complete with refreshments.

The first session was hosted at city hall and included speeches by the city manager, who discussed the council-manager form of government; the director of fiscal and administrative services, who provided an overview of municipal finance; the corporation counsel, who discussed issues in municipal law; and a city councilman, who discussed the role of the elected official and took participants through a typical day in the life of a council member.

The second session, which was held at the water treatment plant, included a tour and speeches by the director of community development, who discussed issues related to land use, and the director of public works/city engineer, who discussed issues related to managing the public rights-of-way. This was the session that generated the largest number of questions from students.

The final session, held at the fire station headquarters, also included a tour of the facility, in addition to speeches from the chief of police on innovations in policing, from the manager of youth and senior services on community outreach for the city's youth and senior populations, and from the fire chief on firefighting techniques.

Any student who participated in at least two of the three sessions was invited to the upcoming city council meeting, recognized in front of the council, and given a certificate of achievement. The hope was that they would then spread the word about the university to family and friends.

### SUMMARY

At the completion of the university, students were asked to evaluate the content and presentation of the course (e.g., the quality of handouts, speakers, materials presented; the usefulness of the information presented; their overall satisfaction with the program). The feedback was extremely positive. As the sessions in this first year were very general, however, the goal for future sessions (the university is planned as an annual event) is to cover more specific issues.

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### Issues in Municipal Law Pop Quiz

- How many units of local governments are there in Illinois?  
 Approximately 2,800  
 Approximately 750  
 Approximately 6,700  
 Too many!
- The primary differences between a "city" and a "village" under Illinois law are that cities have a larger population and cover a larger geographic area than villages.  
 True  
 False
- The Illinois Open Meetings Act requires that the public be allowed to speak at all public meetings.  
 True  
 False
- It is unlawful to appear on any street or in any park or public place in the city of Highland Park while wearing a bathing suit.  
 True  
 False
- A "home rule" city does not have to follow the rules and procedures in the state statutes in order to annex property.  
 True  
 False
- A non-home rule city whose population grows from 20,000 to 26,000 in one year automatically attains home rule status even if the residents don't want it.  
 True  
 False
- Which of the following was *never* the official name of the Highland Park Post Office?  
 St. Johns  
 Green Bay  
 Highland Park  
 Port Clinton
- In what year was the area known as "*The Village of Ravinia*" annexed to the city of Highland Park?  
 1950  
 1933  
 1912  
 1899
- What was the population of the city of Highland Park in 1916?  
 18,033  
 15,502  
 6,931  
 1,154
- Can five members of a seven-member city council attend a political rally for one of their fellow council members without violating the Open Meetings Act?  
 Yes  
 No
- Can two council members of a seven-member city council meet privately with the city manager one hour before a regular council meeting concerning a finance matter that is on that meeting's agenda?  
 Yes  
 No
- Can the same two council members in Question 11 have that same meeting with the city manager if the two council members both serve on the city's three-member finance committee?  
 Yes  
 No
- A city must hold a public hearing before considering any important public policy issue (such as banning handgun possession).  
 True  
 False
- A city council can vote at any time to increase the salaries of its members.  
 True  
 False
- Can a person elected to the city council also serve as a member of the state legislature at the same time?  
 Yes  
 No
- A seven-member traffic commission votes as follows on a motion to recommend to the city council the installation of a new stop sign:  
- three members vote "aye"  
- two members vote "nay"  
- one member votes "pass"  
- one member states "I abstain"  
Does the motion pass?  
 Yes  
 No
- If a member of the city council seconds a motion, he or she cannot vote against that motion during the roll call vote.  
 True  
 False
- Under no circumstances can a city council take final action at a meeting on the Fourth of July.  
 True  
 False
- Unhappy with the number of variances requested by a developer as well as with the developer's arrogance, a councilmember moves to go into closed session to discuss the status. Is the motion in order?  
 Yes  
 No
- Who was the first person to serve as mayor of the city of Highland Park?  
 Dan Pierce  
 Cornelius R. Field  
 Laurel A. St. Johns  
 Frank P. Hawkins



# Hickory, North Carolina: Neighborhood College

*This case study was contributed by Mandy Pitts, public information officer, Hickory, North Carolina, (828) 261-2222, mpitts@ci.hickory.nc.us.*

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Hickory is the banking, commercial, medical, and transportation services hub for a population of 350,000 people, 38,000 of whom live within the city limits. Hickory has been an innovative city since its beginning: it was the first city in North Carolina and the third in the United States to adopt the council-manager form of government. Hickory is famous for its furniture and hosiery industries and now is known for its communications industries, which produce much of the world's supply of fiber-optic cable.

A few years ago, city officials came to realize that many of Hickory's citizens were misinformed about city services and city processes and that those citizens were passing on that misinformation to their neighbors and the media. Then in 1997, a city council member heard about a program that was successful in educating citizens about the local government. The council member brought the idea to the city manager, who thought that oversight of this program would most suitably be in the province of the public information office. After brainstorming a bit, the city held the first Neighborhood College in 1998. The city viewed the Neighborhood College as an opportunity not only to launch a series of classes to educate citizens about the city but also to train future volunteers who might eventually serve on one of the city's 12 boards and commissions.

In September 2001, the city of Hickory began its fourth Neighborhood College class.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The public information office met with fellow department heads to develop a curriculum and a budget. Included in the \$3,000 budget are supplies, such as a notebook with handouts and the entire class schedule, and drinks and snacks for the weekly classes. The budget also covers the graduation ceremony, which includes a diploma, gift, dinner, and beverages. However, it does not include staff time.

To advertise and spotlight the city's first Neighborhood College, the public information office ran articles in all the local papers, showed segments on the local television and radio stations, and sent out brochures to citizens who served on the city's boards and commissions and who participated in city activities. Now, four years later, applications are available all year long, but a media blitz takes place in August in the hopes of getting 20 to 25 students to enroll by the sec-

ond week of September. Attendees range in age from 15 to 75. Neighborhood leaders, business owners, civic club leaders, and high school students apply for the class, as well as citizens who just want to learn about their city. The commitment of time seems to scare a few away, but the students who attend become excited about learning about the city and report that the 13 weeks of classes fly by.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Neighborhood College is a series of professionally led sessions designed to teach citizens about the city of Hickory and the services it provides. The college is an educational experience that gives participants insight into Hickory's history and its governmental process. There is no cost to people who enroll; the city just encourages students to commit to the program and to share the knowledge they receive from it with their family, friends, and neighbors.

Students meet on Monday evenings from 6:00 to 8:00 for 13 weeks. Each class is led by a department head and its employees. The department heads, called "professors" during the course, explain their area and, in some cases, give students a tour of the facility in which they work. Participants are encouraged to ask questions throughout each presentation. During class, students have a light refreshment break and a chance to talk with fellow students and professors.

Topics that have been covered by the class sessions are as follows:

- "From Tavern to City": The city's 131-year history
- "City Council, the City's Election Process and its Changes": The city council and its duties, how the council is elected, and changes caused by Census 2000 results
- "Boards and Commissions": Overview of the city's 12 boards and commissions, from the Public Art Commission to the Planning Commission
- City Administration: The council-manager form of government and how Hickory operates in functional areas
- Neighborhood Focus Program: Building neighborhoods brick by brick
- Planning, Community & Economic Development: Hickory's land use and transportation plan, and the city's economic development activities

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- Census 2000 Results: The changing faces of Hickory and the work of the city's Community Relations Council to promote diversity in the area
- Public Services—Environment and Infrastructure: Everything from clean water to sidewalks and a chance to tour the top-notch water plant that can produce 32 million gallons of water a day
- Transportation Issues—Air Quality, Airport, and the Bus System: The air quality program and plans to recruit a new commuter airline to the regional airport
- Public Safety—Police and Fire: A tour of police headquarters and of one of Hickory's fire stations
- Parks and Recreation: More than 100 recreational programs, as well as 23 parks and recreational centers
- Library Services and Programs: Books, Spanish classes, science courses, and one of the most technologically advanced library systems in the world.

In 2001, Neighborhood College includes sessions about diversity, the city's master plans, and youth in the community and their role in city government.

Classes are held at different city locations, depending on the topic under discussion. For example, when the topic is fire, the class meets at a fire station. In addition to attending class sessions, students are asked

to attend at least two city meetings, whether it is a board, commission, neighborhood, or city council meeting. After each event, the students write a report on what they observed and learned from the meeting. At the end of the program, Neighborhood College holds a graduation ceremony and celebration, and students receive a diploma and even a gift from the mayor.

Although the students seem to like all the classes, favorites include the sessions about the police department, the fire department, and the library. Students leave each session complimenting the city "professors."

### SUMMARY

The success of Neighborhood College is evidenced by the fact that most of the students have made the "dean's list" during the course and many of them are "shining stars" in the city. To be on the dean's list, students must attend all classes and more than two additional city meetings during the course. Out of the 53 graduates to date, 18 serve on either a city board or commission or on an executive board of a neighborhood or business association.

In short, Neighborhood College not only has achieved its goal of producing a more knowledgeable and more active citizenry, but also has made "going back to school" fun in the city of Hickory.

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