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*Leadership Frisco Class VIII at ropes course.
photo provided by Leadership Frisco*

Growing Our Own: Leadership Frisco Provides Opportunities for Residents to Enhance Skills, Improve Community

By Lindsey Townsend

THE CITY OF FRISCO IS TAPPING THE TALENTS and expanding the skill set of its community members through an innovative program open to all residents called Leadership Frisco. Sponsored by the Frisco Chamber of Commerce, the class is designed to produce well-informed and highly motivated individuals qualified to assume leadership roles in the community.

Those who enroll in the class generally already have a strong sense of community and civic responsibility, according to Maher Maso, Mayor Pro Tem in the City of Frisco and chairman of the board of Leadership Frisco. "This program challenges, educates and grows future leaders. Our leaders and potential leaders in government, civic and charitable organizations are given the tools they need to learn how our community operates," says Maso.

Leadership Frisco began eight years ago through the efforts of then-

mayor Kathy Seei and a small group of community leaders. At that time Frisco had just begun to enter its decade of exploding growth and the Chamber's phones were beginning to ring off the hook with people moving to the area. "They'd call up saying, 'My company is relocating us to Frisco next month and we're bringing our four children, two dogs, three fish, a hamster and both sets of grandparents. How can you help us?'" laughs Betty Mahan, a graduate of the first Leadership Frisco class and a long-time Leadership Frisco board member.

Responding to the growing demand for senior services, the first Leadership Frisco class chose to officially document the need for a Senior Center as their major project for the year. Working in conjunction with class members, the City of Frisco's Parks and Recreation Department later established the Frisco Senior Adult Center.

The facility proved so popular that

its members soon outgrew its space. In January 2004, a new \$2.6 million, 10,000 square foot Senior Center at Frisco Square opened at 6670 Moore Street. "The Senior Center is a great example of long-term planning that proves that the rewards of leadership aren't always immediate," adds Mahan.

From that first hit out of the ballpark, Leadership Frisco was off and running. Each class selects a major project to complete during the course of the program. "They really use their own ideas, research skills and vision to decide each year, as a group, what project they feel will most benefit the city," says Frisco Chamber of Commerce president Audie Adkins.

Other projects that Leadership Frisco classes have taken on include Clean It and Green It, a community cleanup and tree-planting effort; development of a local Special Olympics program; the renovation of the Frisco Family Services

Center behind City Hall; Water Wise, a public education and information program for water conservation; and the rebuilding of Friendship Park to incorporate it into Frisco Commons after it was destroyed in a fire in 2002.

Frisco Family Services Center is the only non-profit social service agency in Frisco that provides emergency assistance to low-income households and families in crisis. "We have seen such a tremendous amount of growth over the last few years that we simply would not have been able to keep up with the demand for our services in our old facility," says Jill Cumnock, executive director of the Frisco Family Service Center and a current Leadership Frisco class member.

Such projects have an enormous impact on the community and its residents in tangible ways. "I've been involved with similar leadership programs in the past, but Frisco's is particularly exciting because of its focus on long term community projects that really make a major difference in the quality of life for the entire community," says Henry Hill, deputy city manager for the City of Frisco and a current Leadership Frisco class member.

RESULTS-ORIENTED

Beginning in September and continuing through May, participants in Leadership Frisco meet once a month for approximately eight hours. The nine month-long class includes topics such as social services, leadership styles, city government and services, education, economic development, law and order and parks and recreation.

The course begins with an intense leadership rope skills class in which participants get to know each other while enhancing their team building skills. "After scaling 25 foot poles and then belaying off a 35 foot platform – all the while being supported by my team – I felt like a million bucks," says Cathy Reynolds, vice president and branch manager with Legacy Bank of Texas – Frisco and a member of this year's

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

–Margaret Mead

class. "I did things that day that I never would have done without the support of a team."

Many Leadership Frisco participants find that the program offers unexpected rewards. "The information, access to accomplished and influential city officials and citizens and the relationships you form are invaluable" says Nikki Carmody James, name partner, Carmody & James Law Firm.

After graduating from the program, participants are better prepared for a variety of community opportunities. Three past graduates have gone on to City Council positions and many serve on community boards.

But the program offers invaluable skills to the average "soccer mom" in Frisco as well as local business leaders. "Not everyone who goes through the program will want to serve on the City Council or the Frisco Economic Development Board. It's also incredibly empowering for the average citizen," says Mahan.

INTERESTED IN APPLYING?

Anyone who is 18 years or older who has lived or worked in Frisco for at least one year may apply for the Leadership Frisco program. The tuition fee for each applicant is \$400. For more information or an application, contact the Frisco Chamber of Commerce at 972.335.9522.

Lindsey Townsend is a freelance writer living in Lake Dallas.