



A Voyage of Discovery: learn about life in the Lowcountry with Beaufort County Senior Leadership

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By Terry Rice

“A Voyage of Discovery” is the slogan for the Beaufort County Senior Leadership (BCSL) program presented by Clemson University and co-sponsored by the Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce.

“It’s like a 12-day field trip for big kids” said a recent graduate.



The program is designed as an informational and active experience for Beaufort County residents about a variety of subjects related to living in the county. The objective of the program is to inspire participants to become involved in volunteerism and civic engagement aligned with their own leadership skills and personal interests.

The Beaufort County Senior Leadership Mission: Building community through civic engagement.

Military Day includes a tour of Parris Island, and an afternoon at the Marine Air Station.

Open to all residents of Beaufort County, the program provides participants the opportunity to meet, ask questions of and speak with county and local government leaders, and representatives from the public, private and charitable sectors; as well as witness demonstrations from public safety officials.

In 2013, Beaufort, ranked first as “America’s Happiest Seaside Towns” by Coastal Living Magazine and in 2014 Beaufort ranked first in Southern Living Magazine’s “List of Small Towns We Love”; Second on AARP’s “America’s Best Small Towns”; Seventh on Smithsonian Magazine’s “America’s Best Small Towns to Visit”; and ranked Number 1 as the “Healthiest County in South Carolina” by the 2014 County Health Rankings. The

scores are based on a number of variables associated with quality of life, environment and availability of services.

AAA Carolinas featured Beaufort as a coastal destination in the March/April 2014 Issue of GO Magazine and honored both the Cuthbert House and The Rhett House Inn with its prestigious AAA Four Diamond Award designation.

Beaufort County was founded in 1769 and is one of 46 South Carolina counties; it comprises 92.3 square miles of land area and 658 square miles of water surface.

According to the authors of “Trivia About Beaufort County, SC,” Esther Truesdale and Jim Cato, “There are at least 64 large islands and about 1,400 small islands” in Beaufort County.

In as much as our surroundings are in the very heart of the sea islands, it’s no wonder that Larry Bernard, 2011 graduate and BCSL Marketing Director, states, “We decided to call the individual topic areas ‘Ports of Call’ to be consistent with the program motto ‘A Voyage of Discovery’ and the geography of the area.”

Three of the Ports of Call — History/Heritage/Culture; Economic Development; and Environment — require two days because of the extensive subject matter covered. Other Ports of Call are Local/County Government; The Arts, Education, Human Services, Health Resources; Public Safety/Law Enforcement; and Military Ties and History.

The program meets on Wednesdays from January through early April at different Ports of Call such as USCB, the county government center and Town Hall, Parris Island and MCAS, and Penn Center.

“I enjoyed having remarkable access to local leaders and places that I otherwise would not have had an opportunity to meet and observe. The program increased my understanding of local business and government operations and challenges,” said Randall Bergmann, another 2014 program participant.

Tony Mills, education director of the Lowcountry Institute, spent the day with the 2014 class at the Art Barn on Spring Island. He discussed Lowcountry critters, habitats and took the group on a habitat safari around Spring Island. He and cinematographer, Rob Lewis, host “Coastal Kingdom” — a journey through some of the richest and most diverse habitats of the Lowcountry. The class also heard from Laura Lee Rose of the Clemson Extension Master Gardener Program and Native Plant Society.

“I have lived in Beaufort for 15 years and learned so much about our environment and government. Learning about the beauty and special ecology of the Port Royal Sound and ACE Basin has made me a better naturalist” said Jim Weiss, a 2014 program participant.

During Economic Day 1, Rob Wells, Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce, Vice President, Tourism Division, explained the concept of “Turbo Tourist.” They are the visitors who make yearly visits to Beaufort to explore and experience the wonder of the area, and by the fifth visit, they are exploring permanent residency. Tourism is the Number 1 job creator for Beaufort County and generates over \$1 billion in annual revenue. Tourism provides \$700 in annual tax savings per household, these were among the sound bites that senior leadership program participants heard during Rob’s presentation.

“Thank you so much, Clemson Extension, for providing a top notch program with your Senior Leadership class. Outstanding speakers, interesting experiences, and a great way to learn about many aspects of my new

‘hometown.’ I really enjoyed interacting with my classmates and looked forward to each and every Wednesday. This experience opened my eyes to the various possibilities to get involved in the community and where I fit in,” said Deb Ahlers from the class of 2014.

Challenged by BCSL Program Directors Bob Guinn and Ed Pappas to recruit new participants by sharing their experience within as well as beyond the boundaries of their own communities and social circles, 2014 graduates became the new ambassadors of the program.

To keep the program relevant and dynamic, each graduating class is responsible for developing and planning the program for the following year. The Ports of Call generally remain the same, but the speakers, the Ports of Call and the sub-topics tend to differ each year to reflect current issues and relevance.

With planning sessions under way, highlights of the 2015 program include:

- A history presentation by Dr. Theodore Rosengarten, author of “Tombee: Portraits of a Cotton Picker.”
- A downtown walking tour with a focus on tourism during one of the economic days.
- A briefing on disaster preparedness by a member of public safety.
- A Tour of the 4th Battalion (Women) at Parris Island and a visit to the new pilot training center at MCAS during Military Ties and History day.

The class of 2015 will be the program’s 23rd year serving Beaufort County. More than 735 residents have attended the program and many now serve as a volunteer in a position that fits their interest and lifestyle.

“We all knew Beaufort was a diamond we simply didn’t know all its facets!” exclaimed Charlie Francis during 2014 closing remarks.

Reserve your seat today as the class size is limited to 35 participants (and 19 seats are already filled).

For more information about the Beaufort County Senior Leadership Program, visit

www.beaufortseniorleadership.com and download 2015 applications, or call Bob Guinn at 843-255-6060,