

# Leadership Portage always impresses

Looking for a way to learn more about Portage County and its communities and institutions plus an easy way to meet interesting new people? Leadership Portage County may be just what you need.

That sentence paraphrases what I wrote after I experienced Leadership Portage County by participating in its 1992-93 class, the second full year of the organization's operation.

Leadership Portage County has begun accepting applications from those who want to become members of the Class of 2018 and, 25 years later, my message has not changed. LPC, the acronym by which so many of us call the program, offers an effective crash course about Portage County that for one day, once a month from September through May, introduces class members to different aspects of the community.

Leaders in different fields present topics to the class that include: business, education, government, health and social services. There is at least one group tour of Portage County. Class members meet and hear from law enforcement officers, tour the county jail, visit schools, tour different businesses, visit Portage UH Medical Center (our local hospital) and NEOMED (the medical college), hear from leaders in education, learn about public health issues, and hear from those who work in the social services.

A Leadership Conference, open to the public, is held in April at NEOMED and this year's keynote is golfing great Ben Cur-



DAVID DIX  
Along the Way

tis, the PGA tour golfer who won the British Open several years ago. He described the Curtis Foundation, which he and his wife, Candace, operate that sends home free lunches during extended weekends to school youngsters who are believed to lack sufficient nutritious food and receive free lunches at the schools. You might be astonished to learn that approximately half of all the youngsters in the Kent schools qualify for these lunches.

The program days are book-ended by an opening retreat in which newcomers in the class get to know one another and describe their perceptions of life in Portage County and are asked to identify the major issues.

The final day consists of another retreat, usually hosted at Hiram College, during which class members discuss how their perceptions have changed. The issue that emerged as far more urgent than it had seemed at the beginning, was the drug crisis, a kind of epidemic that burdens the work place's hiring of dependable employees, our schools, health care institutions and law enforcement agencies.

Denise Baba, in her second year as executive director, does a wonderful job running Leadership Portage County. She also is serving this year as president of the Ohio School Boards Association. Pitch-



Those able to attend Leadership Portage County's final retreat and graduation at Hiram College recently were: Front row, left, Jennifer Derthick, Elizabeth Tepsick, Katherine Manning, Helene Leightner, Karen Ross, Sue Brannon, Angela Bennett, JaCari Parks, Chris Cheline, Stephanie Berry; middle row, left, Executive Director Denise Baba, Amy Craft, Jill Thompson, Kristin Olafsdottir, Chad Collins, Joseph Diorio, Robert Steinheiser, Kate DeAngelis, Susan Lynn, Ryann Kuchenbecker; back row, left, Joshua Rider, Eric Decker, Rob Peters, Gary Slapnick, Jim Prusha, Lawrence Carter, Chris Pratt, Richard Kasmer, David Moore. Not pictured: Bob Dunn, Maggie McKendry, Amanda Senn, Natasha Schwartz.

ing in during the retreats have been group facilitators Melissa Holmes, PhD, and, for the final retreat, Holmes plus Janet Dix, PhD.

## Class Project

Usually, class members adopt a class project to undertake together that represents their commitment to a better Portage County. This year's project, co-chaired by Lawrence Carter and Stephanie Berry, earmarks Miller House in Kent, which exists to provide emergency shelter and protection for adults (often abused women) and children facing a housing crisis.

"We have a new swing set, donated by Habitat for Humanity's "ReStore" and a playhouse that Step 2 is

giving us," Carter said. He added the class is going to gather to repaint and spruce up the Great Room at Miller House during the month of June.

During my Leadership Class year in 1993, I met terrific people I might not have otherwise had the opportunity to get to know. Some have remained friends all these years. A native in these parts, I thought I knew Portage County backwards and forwards, but often came home surprised at what I had learned about my community.

Usually, we think the town we live in is all we need to know. The Leadership Portage County experience opens one's eyes to the fact that we are a collection of communities, each

with its own set of issues, many of which overlap within Portage County.

## 2017: 32 Graduates

Those graduating: Angela Bennett, digital marketing specialist, Northeast Ohio Medical University; Stephanie Berry, marketing director, Family & Community Services; Sue Brannon, budget & finance administrator, Portage County Job & Family Services; Lawrence Carter, Kent Hotel asset manager for the Kent State University Foundation; Chris Cheline, director of finance operations, Mental Health & Recovery Board; Chad Collins manager, Habitat ReStore; Amy Craft, grants administrator, Portage County Regional Planning; Kate DeAngelis, marketing di-

rector, Neighborhood Development Services; Eric Decker, Portage Community Bank; Jennifer Derthick, Portage County Board of Developmental Disabilities; Joseph Diorio, Portage County Health Commission; Bob Dunn, superintendent of Southeast Schools; Richard Kasmer, vice dean, College of Pharmacy, Northeast Ohio Medical University; Ryann Kuchenbecker, executive director, Ravenna Chamber of Commerce; Helene Leightner, Portage County Job & Family Services;

Susan Lynn, benefits specialist, Portage County; Katherine Manning, director of planning, PARTA; Maggie McKendry, associate director of athletic achievement, Kent State; David Moore, MIS coordinator, Portage County Job & Family Services; Kristin Olafsdottir, bursar, Kent State; JaCari Parks, assistant principal, Ravenna Schools; Rob Peters, economic development director, Streetsboro; Chris Pratt, customer service specialist, The Middlefield Banking Co.; Jim Prusha, operations captain, Kent Police; Joshua Rider, director of the Center for Adult L& Veteran Affairs, Kent State University; Karen Ross, Reed Memorial Library; Natasha Schwartz, Third Federal Savings & Loan; Amanda Seen, Signet Management; Gary Slapnick, Portage County Board of Developmental Disabilities; Robert Steinheiser, Coleman Adult Daly Services; Erika Tepsick, Johnson Matthey Process Technologies; Jill Thompson, Northeast Ohio Medical University.