



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 29, 2022

YOUTHLEADS PARTICIPANTS NAMED JUNE 'FACES'

Uniontown, PA – For several days this month, when other teens were enjoying a break from schoolwork and responsibilities, 15 teens from six Fayette County schools gave up a portion of their summer breaks in order to learn how to develop their leadership skills.

Those students attended the first-ever Fayette YouthLeads! program, hosted by the Fayette Business Education Partnership (FBEP) and the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, and held at various locations throughout the county.

Sponsors of the program included Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Investment Board, WVU Medicine Uniontown Hospital, Fay-Penn Economic Development Council, and The Grayson House.

For their dedication to developing leadership skills and commitment to their communities, the students have earned the Faces and Places designation for June.

FBEP Coordinator Kathi Hull said she had been working on the program since well before school let out for the summer.

“Really, we started well before June. This program has been in the planning for a couple of years. It was sidelined by COVID last year but building leadership skills with our students to help guide them in good workforce choices is so vital; we kept the plans in motion and are ecstatic to have successfully completed our first cohort,” she said. “We started recruiting for the first group in May by reaching out to all the school districts. We also reached out to our Fayette Chamber members and the folks who attend our Business Education Partnership meetings to see if they knew any students who would be interested.”

Hull added, “These programs are so important. Through our youth leadership and workforce development programs, we work to guide and inspire students to gain practical skills that can help shape their decisions about further study, careers, and as future leaders.”

Hull said participating students needed to be “high school students with a desire to expand their knowledge of the community and a willingness to dedicate a small portion of their summer to leadership development. The participants also needed a grade-point average of 2.5 or higher and a letter of recommendation from a teacher or faculty member.”

The 15 students accepted into the program came from Albert Gallatin, Brownsville, Frazier, Laurel Highlands and Uniontown Area school districts, as well as Calvary Chapel Christian School in Brownsville.

Hull said, "This group of amazing young people grew into a cohesive group of active learners very quickly. It was great to see them come together as a team and work together to build skills."

The five-day program began with a kick-off night that included team-building exercises and icebreakers. Each morning, students were given a leadership curriculum created by Sarah Sladek, an author and researcher on the topic of generational differences at XYZ University, Hull said.

"Sarah enlisted help from her daughter Katelyn, who is 16 years old, to develop the custom curriculum specifically for us in Fayette County," Hull added. "They provided their part virtually, and it included various daily discussions and activities (the students) were to complete."

Each day featured its own topics of discussion and opportunities to meet with local community leaders. The first day focused on business and entrepreneurship, and students met with Jennifer Jubin and Courtney Gardner of COE Distributing.

On the second day, the focus shifted to finance and meet-ups with Pam Moore, Ashley Perez and Dan Spinelli of Somerset Trust Company's Uniontown branch. Fayette Chamber of Commerce President Devan White of Wealth Enhancement Group spoke to the students during lunch.

Day 3 was Government Day and kicked off at Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Fayette County, a partner in the program, where the students gathered teddy bear donations that were then delivered to family court. Participants had the chance to meet with Fayette County Commissioners Dave Lohr, Vince Vicites and Scott Dunn, along with Judge Steve Leskinen and Assistant District Attorney Rob Harper.

Staff members from PA CareerLink and the Westmoreland Fayette Workforce Investment Board met with the students on Workforce Day.

Finally, participants were ready for Presentation Day.

"The students were given a project that they were to present on the last day simply called 'Project Leadership,'" Hull said. "This project was the culmination of the skills gained. Each student presented their thoughts about the leadership principals they felt were most important and most applicable in everyday life and they shared their perception of the ideal leader."

Participants said the program taught them several things about themselves and helped them make new friends, along with giving them a fresh perspective on local businesses and leadership.

Frazier High School student Aubrey Baumiller said the program helped her learn that leadership isn't a one-size-fits-all concept.

"My biggest takeaway from the program was there are many different forms of leadership in the community because there are many different types of jobs in the community," she said.

Jayden Dillinger a sophomore from Brownsville Area High School agreed. "I learned that the type of leader you are depends on your personality," she said.

"I learned that everyone had a different opinion on what makes a good leader," Albert Gallatin sophomore Sarah Nuttall added.

Ben Lowry, a sixth grader in the Albert Gallatin School District and the youngest student to complete the program, said he learned "leaders can be different ages." Lowry attended the program alongside his mother, co-facilitator Misty Hiltabidel of Fay-Penn Economic Development Council.

Upon completion of the program, each student received a certificate from both the Fayette Business Education Partnership and its partner agencies, as well as a certificate of completion from XYZ University.

Hull said the goal of Fayette YouthLeads! is to develop ethical leaders committed to active community involvement, and though this year's program was the pilot, it has already been quite a success. Programs like this foster those important skills that provide for good employment, build community service ideology and in turn, will help make our communities better.

"The whole project provided a great opportunity to work together with our other agency partners and the business community to build a program with extreme value for the future of Fayette. This was the pilot year. We told the kids that going into it," Hull said. "We are extremely happy with the end result and are excited to see where it leads for next year."

###

This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the 2016 Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.

For more information, contact Kristi Kassimer Harper, Public Relations Specialist, at 412-691-0262, kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info or Jamie Rankin, Journalist, at 724-434-4486, jamierankin13@gmail.com.