



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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18 LOCAL LEADERS SET TO GRADUATE FROM LEADERSHIP FAYETTE PROGRAM

Uniontown, PA – In just one month, 18 Fayette County “people leaders” will gather in Connellsville to honor one another for their commitment to lead and to celebrate their completion of this year’s Leadership Fayette program.

Initially launched years ago and more recently managed through a collaboration between Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus and Fay-Penn Economic Development Council, Leadership Fayette brings together professionals from a wide range of organizations and industries who are seeking to grow personally and professionally. The result is stronger leaders, stronger companies, and a stronger Fayette County.

Kathi Hull, workforce and special projects coordinator for the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, said that Penn State Fayette reached out to the Chamber a few years ago regarding the continuation of the program, which has since evolved into a partnership between the Chamber and Fay-Penn.

Hull, along with Misty Hiltabidel, workforce and business service manager at Fay-Penn, coordinate the annual program. Both noted, however, that the true driver of this year’s success has been Emily Dennis, Ph.D.

Direct feedback from previous cohorts led Hull and Hiltabidel to tap Dennis, who had led individual sessions in the past, to facilitate the entire program for this year’s class.

“She stood out as a star and was cited over and over as past participants’ most impactful session, leading us to recruit her,” Hull said. “She is amazing and does an incredible job.”

Hiltabidel echoed Hull’s praise.

“Dr. Emily Dennis has elevated our Leadership Fayette program to new heights, encouraging our cohort to learn more about themselves and how to effectively lead others,” she said. “Her direction has allowed our participants to grow their individual leadership styles and has set them on a pathway to continue advancing their careers in ways I don’t think would be possible without this program.”

Dennis, a Gallup-certified strengths coach and expert in leadership and change management, said the program has been built session by session this year using real-time feedback from participants. The base outline for the course was established after participants completed a leadership self-evaluation.

“We want leadership to move from transactional to transformational,” Dennis said, noting that participants are required to showcase two field projects that demonstrate their growth and commitment, while underscoring how their leadership can impact the culture of their companies and organizations.

She explained that participants begin by learning to lead themselves, then progress to leading teams, organizations, and ultimately managing change. Dennis said the program emphasizes “strategy over coincidence,” resulting in more positive outcomes and long-term success.

Participants in this year’s cohort represent a diverse cross-section of industries, from banking to healthcare, and for the first time, also include small business owners looking to further develop their leadership skills.

Graduation is set for May 15 at a ceremony at Trailside Landing in Connellsville.

“Everyone who has participated in the program this year has had wonderful things to say about it...They really have bonded,” Hull said. “They are even talking about meeting as a group quarterly after graduation to continue supporting one another.”

“I don’t know if we will ever have a cohort quite like this one again,” Dennis said, adding that the experience has been as rewarding for her as it has been for those participating in the program.

“It is amazing to see the transformation of our participants as they realize their potential,” Hiltabidel said. “If you or someone in your company shows potential for upward mobility, please consider joining our 2026–2027 cohort of Leadership Fayette.”

Muriel Johnson-Nuttall, Executive Director of the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, emphasized the broader impact of the program.

“Leadership programs like this are not just about individual growth, they are about building the kind of strong, forward-thinking leadership that our business community depends on,” she said. “When we invest in developing leaders, we are investing in the continued success, resilience, and growth of Fayette County as a whole.”

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