

Leadership Camden: Looking for a Few Good Camdenites (three pages in total)

The unique charm of Camden has convinced the “cream of the crop” to call this county home. Though there is much about this community to love - lush beauty, sunshine, fun fiestas - our true treasure is our people. One only has to step into a store, a school, or other establishment in Kingsland, St. Marys, Woodbine, or anywhere in between, to experience the friendly, caring, and kind attitude that will make you feel instantly welcomed and at home.

You may be asking yourself, “What can I do to make sure Camden continues to be the best place to live in the country?” The Camden County Chamber of Commerce offers an opportunity to do just that with its “Leadership Camden” program. For over twenty years, Leadership Camden (LC) has recruited those who aspire to do everything they can for the place in which they live. But what is Leadership Camden all about?

It is about going out into this great community, into every area that impacts the citizenry, to discover what makes it tick. It is about bringing together a network of top talent. It is about providing awareness of the issues that will shape our future.

During the 10-12 session Leadership Camden class, you will explore the following subjects, with an “up close and personal” approach:

- Camden County History
- Healthcare
- K-12 and Higher Education
- Government
- Politics
- Judicial System and Law Enforcement
- Economic Workforce Development
- Marketing Camden
- Parks & Recreation
- Investing in Your Local Community
- Leadership in a Diverse Community

To give you an idea of what the Chamber is looking for in a Leadership Camden member, what follows is a sampling of current and past Leadership Camden participants’ answers to questions on the application for LC. You can find a copy of the application at www.camdenchamber.com.

Camden County Chief Magistrate Judge Jennifer Lewis is the 2009-2010 Leadership Camden Committee Chair. Judge Lewis is the first female chief magistrate in Camden, and she teaches other magistrate judges in the state for the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education. We asked Judge Lewis what she thinks makes someone a good candidate for Leadership Camden. “A good candidate is a person who is willing to ask the tough

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questions and learn something from Leadership each day.” And what does Judge Lewis think is the most pressing issue facing Camden County today? “The most pressing issue right now is the lack of economic development in the county. Camden County is a wonderful place to live, but I think that it is becoming a bedroom community. Camden citizens are drawn to jobs in Brunswick and Jacksonville and it would be wonderful if we could really follow the motto of the Chamber of Commerce and ‘Keep It In Camden.’”

An alumnus of Leadership Camden, Captain Mike McKinnon, USN, Ret., has a unique perspective when it comes to our fair county. McKinnon was the Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base Commanding Officer from August 2004 through July 2007. During this time, Kings Bay was awarded the 2007 Commander in Chief’s Annual Award for Installation Excellence, an annual presidential award given to the top or best naval installation in the world.

We asked Captain McKinnon, president of The Camden Partnership, what made him want to become involved in Leadership Camden. “Knowledge is power. I wanted to learn more about the community in which I live and serve. I wanted to know what challenges our community is facing, what our leaders are doing about them and what needs to be done in the future.”

“You never stop learning about leadership,” McKinnon continued. “I wanted to learn from others and through sharing experiences in the learning process. Another benefit of participating in Leadership Camden is networking. Leadership is about influence...your network and building consensus on issues and how to address them is a way to positively influence the outcome.”

As a past instructor for Leadership Dalton, Ken Kessler, Community Planning & Development Director for the City of Kingsland, recognized a good thing when he saw it. Kessler, who has 35 years of planning experience and holds a master’s degree in City Planning from Georgia Tech, is not one to mince words. “Surviving the current government revenue crisis without sacrificing the future” was his concise answer to the question about Camden County’s most pressing issue today. Kessler also suggested that what helps make a good candidate for Leadership Camden are civic mindedness and being open to new and different attitudes.

Barbara Mizelle has lived in Camden County for 19 years, and her husband was an LC participant the year before she was. Together, they own and operate the Island Lounge and Grill, located at the Cumberland Island Inn & Suites. We asked this active Chamber member what she had accomplished by being involved with Leadership Camden. “Leadership strengthened my skills in several areas, and helped me to understand better that there is more than one answer or avenue to pursue when trying to sort out problems.” She also feels that LC was a way to add positive reinforcement to her life.

You might have seen our next alumni, Doug Cooper, on TV Camden lately. An active

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member of the St. Marys Library Board of Trustees, the St. Marys Board of Ethics, CCHS Band Boosters, the Camden-Kings Bay Council of the U. S. Navy League, president the St. Marys Submarine Museum, and the Chairman of the “Keep Camden Beautiful” Pre-Certification Committee, Doug definitely doesn’t let any moss grow under his feet. Owner of Coastal Oaks Home Inspections, Cooper was very enthusiastic about what he has gained from his participation in Leadership Camden. “I made some great friends through the months of Leadership Camden! I feel I also have an almost ‘insider’s’ view on many of the issues that get the citizens involved in the community.” As with Mike McKinnon and many other LC members, Cooper also felt that the networking opportunities allowed by the experience are tremendous. “The network contacts I made through the program continue to be of great value almost daily in my professional and personal life.”

Have you ever asked yourself “Where is my place in this world?” Well, Mary Jane Brooks asked herself the same question, and Leadership Camden helped her to answer it. Brooks, a licensed property and casualty insurance agent and office manager for Axiom Insurance Agency in Kingsland, was happy to share about her LC experience. “After commuting thirty miles and working in another community for 14 years, I had lost touch with my home community. Leadership Camden provided me with the opportunity to get back in touch with the place that I live, and discover all the wonderful services that are available right here in Camden County.”

Brooks was outspoken about her concerns for Camden’s future. “I have watched Camden County grow over the last 20 years and I believe that the most important issue is to have a good plan for that continued growth. We need to look ahead and have a ‘snap shot’ of what we want our community to look like in ten years...we need to get a plan and then work it.”

Christine Daniel, president of the Camden County Chamber of Commerce, is grateful for these dedicated individuals and their passion for this place. She also looks forward to working with the next group of LC participants. “I have found that Leadership Camden doesn’t only improve the county, it improves the person. You can’t help but grow and learn through this process, and that’s what the people who apply are looking for, in part. They also want to give back some of what Camden County and those in it have given to them.”

Classes are held monthly beginning in August of 2009 and will run through May of 2010. The class is also expected to complete a class project of their choice. Partial scholarships will be awarded. The deadline to apply is June 19th and the class will be selected by July 6th.

For more information about being a part of this great program, visit www.camdenchamber.com and click on the Leadership Camden brochure and application links, right at the top of the page. Or you can call the Chamber at (912) 729-5840. We look forward to hearing from you, and helping you get better acquainted - or re-acquainted - with Camden!

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