

## **Josette Ayres, guest columnist: Sharpening your skills as a community leader**

**JOSETTE AYRES Guest columnist | Posted: Saturday, August 10, 2013 12:01 am**

What makes a community grow and prosper? This thought comes to mind as I take in the visible transformations underway all across the Greater Waco community.

We know that community development is a process, sometimes occurring over generations. Strategic planning, effective communication, visioning, fundraising and consensus-building only happen under the auspices and watchful eye of leadership and are essential to the success of this process. A community prospers when those same principles and tools are executed in civic service by its citizenry.

Unfortunately, regardless of how noble our volunteer efforts are, those tools are not commonly used in most civic organizations. What if you could gain or expand those skills to help our community prosper through your service to others?

A few years ago, through the Community Visioning Project, the Today's Action Tomorrow's Leaders Steering Committee was formed with the vision of ensuring a prospering Greater Waco community by empowering its civic leadership. They chose to introduce as its first initiative, LeadershipPlenty, a broad-based community leadership training program focusing on strengthening the skills of those who hold leadership positions in our community and making civic leadership training available to those who may not consider themselves leaders. Their goal was to increase the number of individuals capable, available and willing to serve in community/civic, nonprofit and government service arenas in the future.

Participants would also work within the organizations they currently serve, taking back key learning to the ever-growing needs of the community. The intention of these efforts is squarely aimed at ensuring the prosperity and growth of Waco's civic community. Two groups have completed the program and a third is scheduled to start this fall.

I had the pleasure of being one of the 12 participants in the inaugural class. I believe our class reflected the diversity of our community. Our group was made up of those young, seasoned, native Texans, devoted implants, teachers, missionaries, community pioneers, active community servants and some just trying to find out how to be best utilized. In the end we were all linked by a commitment to seeing Waco be a community at its best. We ended the program as a network of citizens well trained and prepared to serve. Having had considerable community involvement prior to participating in LeadershipPlenty, I found the program very beneficial to improving my effectiveness as a leader. I gained skills that have allowed me to build bridges across the community, linking with other groups and agencies and building

valuable partnerships in community service.

The LeadershipPlenty Institute is facilitated by local community volunteers over 10 days. Participants learn meeting facilitation, how to identify community assets and communication techniques. They also gain skills to improve meeting effectiveness, negotiate and develop consensus, create partnerships, resolve conflicts and turn a discussion into meaningful results.

Employers of the LeadershipPlenty graduates and future participants should be commended for allowing their employees to participate in this valuable program. Without the support of employers, and the understanding that development of one's employees is mutually beneficial, this program would not be possible.

If you know of someone or would like to take advantage of this unique experience, the deadline is fast approaching. Please email [jbland@wacofoundation.org](mailto:jbland@wacofoundation.org).

**Josette Ayres serves as president of the Waco chapter of Parents for Public Schools and is a national board member for Parents for Public Schools. She currently serves as board chair for Quinn Campus Incorporated to foster the continued revitalization of the former Paul Quinn College campus in Waco.**