

For Leadership Center, 20 years is a time to celebrate

by Scott McCaffrey, Sun Gazette Newspapers



Shown at the Leadership Center for Excellence 20th-anniversary celebration at Army Navy Country Club were, from left, Mark Ingrao, Greg Hamilton, Betsy Frantz, Gordon Throll and Bob Hawthorne. (Leadership Center for Excellence photo)

In the beginning, two decades ago, the Leadership Center for Excellence began life with a budget of \$22,000, a logo . . . and a part-time CEO in the person of Betsy Frantz.

“Not many leaders would have taken on that challenge, but Betsy knew this would be something special,” said Mark Ingrao, who has watched the organization grow from those humble beginnings to one that has a graduate base of more than 1,600 leaders, a staff of 11 and an annual budget of \$1.6 million.

Many of those who have been involved in the organization through the past 20 years were on hand June 12 at Army Navy Country Club, for both an anniversary celebration and a salute to its founding chief executive.

“We have embraced responsibility for the common good – working, serving, inspiring, enlightening and connecting leaders,” said Rev. Dr. Leonard Hamlin Sr., a member of the Class of 2001 of the Leadership Arlington (as the organization was known in its early years) signature training program.

That program takes individuals from the corporate, government and non-profit sectors and, over the course of nine months, provides in-depth training both on issues of importance across the region and improves participants' leadership skills.

The initiative was an outgrowth of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, including then-president Rich Doud, Gordon Thrall of Guernsey Office Products and Bob Hawthorne of United Bank.

"As I look back over my 47 years of business in Arlington, helping with the start of Leadership Arlington is one of my greatest accomplishments," Hawthorne said.

Frantz previously had served as director of development for the Northern Virginia Community Foundation and president of the Junior League of Northern Virginia. During her tenure with the Leadership Center for Excellence, it added programs for young professionals and high-school students and provided a host of training programs and special events throughout the year, while expanding its footprint from exclusively Arlington to a more regional base.

"Under Betsy's incredible leadership, our organization has broadened its mission in response to the need for community-building and leadership-development," said Ingrao, currently president of the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce. "She knew the right time to pivot the organization to the regional organization it is today."

The Leadership Center has evolved into "an integral and necessary part" of the community it serves, said Deborah Tompkins Johnson, regional director of Northern Virginia state and local affairs for Dominion Energy.

"In many cases, it breathed life's learning and dreams into each participant, inspiring us to create new goals, purpose and the ability to follow through," Johnson said.

As for Frantz? "She is one of a kind," Johnson said, "masterful at creating results, at teaching, facilitating, listening . . . and doing so in a strong, caring and compassionate manner."

That was a sentiment echoed by Hamlin, who recently departed Macedonia Baptist Church for a post at the National Cathedral.

Frantz "has given of herself so we would be inspired to give to others – [to] embrace responsibility for the common good," he said.

Frantz earlier this year departed the Leadership Center for a position leading the Virginia Hospital Center Foundation. Liz Nohra, the Leadership Center's chief operating officer, is serving as interim CEO.

Nohra said the impact of the organization can be felt through "the ripple effect of leadership facilitating these moments of connection and community impact."

The dinner event was sponsored by JBG Smith, Virginia Hospital Center, Fulton Bank and United Bank. Support of the business communities for civic-minded organizations is "one reason why this community is so strong," said Greg Hamilton, who chairs the Leadership Center board of regents.

Doud, who retired from the Arlington Chamber in 2014, was unable to attend the celebration, but sent along his best wishes, starting with what long ago became his catch-phrase: "It's a great day to be in Arlington."