Leadership Development Project Re-energized
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In 2008, Hart County and Archway formed a partnership in an effort to address community needs and allocate higher education resources to this county about 90 miles northeast of Atlanta. Following a series of listening sessions facilitated in the community, a list of top priorities was formed, with leadership development highlighted as a primary focus area.

After a decade-long absence from the county, Leadership Hart, an initiative to better prepare and equip community leaders and officials, was rejuvenated by the Hart County Chamber of Commerce and Archway. The Leadership Hart planning committee, made up of representatives from local agencies and non-profit organizations, began meeting regularly in early spring 2009 to identify needed leadership skills, connect with available resources, and plan the details of the program.

To help revitalize the program, Archway brought together Hart County representatives and facilitators from the University of Georgia’s Fanning Institute to assist in the planning the leadership group’s first meeting. During this initial discussion session, organizers offered information on how to organize a community initiative, and informed the group on how to locate resources. The group has since applied for and received a $5,000 Community Leadership Initiative seed grant offered through the Georgia Rural Development Council, as well as funding and in-kind support from more than ten local organizations and businesses.

The Leadership Hart planning committee has developed a program agenda that utilizes community leadership curriculum created by the Fanning Institute, and the Institute has partnered with local program instructors to facilitate several Leadership Hart class sessions. An Archway summer intern from the University of Georgia worked with the group to develop a logo for Leadership Hart, while another intern wrote an article for the local newspaper, The Hartwell Sun, inviting interested community members to apply to the program.

Members of the 2009 Leadership Hart class, made up of 20 members with diverse backgrounds, were selected in August and recently attended the program orientation and kick-off. The program is composed of daylong sessions, held once a month from August until April, as well as an overnight mountain retreat. Class members will collaborate on a community project and the program will culminate in a graduation ceremony in May. Current class members will then ensure the future success and sustainability of Leadership Hart by helping recruit the next class.

“We have a lot of talent in our community,” said Leadership Hart planning committee chair Jason Acosta, a member of both the Chamber of Commerce and the Archway Partnership executive committee. “We need to make sure we develop it to further strengthen Hart County.”

Advancing Community Priorities: The Hart County Archway Partnership has identified community leadership development as one of its four key community priorities. By developing and inspiring committed leaders, Leadership Hart will help build a stronger community with local, regional and state agencies to create a cohesive network for community improvement.