Youth Leadership Academy Graduates 25 Students
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The Pulaski Tomorrow Youth Leadership Academy enrolled 25 students in the inaugural class conducted in 2014. This unique program is the combined effort of the University of Georgia’s (UGA) J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, Pulaski Tomorrow, Hawkinsville/Pulaski Chamber of Commerce and the Pulaski County Archway Partnership.

The program uses the *Youth Leadership in Action* curriculum developed by the Fanning Institute. “This curriculum helps youth develop leadership skills by allowing students to experience hands-on activities and interact in real-life leadership opportunities. The objectives are designed to build skills starting from within the individual, moving to group and team processes, and ending with community involvement. One unique element addressed in this curriculum is the development of core values as articulated by the Georgia State Board of Education: citizenship, respect for others, and respect for self.”  [From www/fanning.uga.edu]

Through the Youth Leadership Academy, Pulaski County participants learn about opportunities to become involved in the community and share ideas on how to shape the future of their local community. The curriculum includes sessions on communicating effectively, appreciating differences, setting goals, making good decisions and understanding community involvement opportunities.

Participants visited the State Capitol to meet with the local legislative delegation, toured Robins Air Force Base to learn about career opportunities and completed a team-building challenge course at Callaway Gardens, where they zip-lined and climbed rope bridges. In addition to the facilitated curriculum, participants also engaged in volunteer work. Participants also sponsored a book drive for preschool children, hosted reading sessions and distributed the books through the office of Dr. Sandra Kopacz, a local pediatrician.

Madison Hulett, a tenth grader at Hawkinsville High School and one of the participants in the program said, “This program has given me the courage and the lessons to become a better and more confident leader.”

The program is open to 25 applicants annually in grades 10-12. Students must complete an application, write an essay about a leader whom they admire, and provide a recommendation letter from a teacher and community member. Participants may attend Hawkinsville High School, Westfield School or Fullington Academy.

The program has received tremendous support from the community at large. Local businesses sponsor the program and all sessions are facilitated and taught by community volunteers. Before the start of the Pulaski Tomorrow Youth Leadership Academy, 26 community members were trained as formal facilitators by faculty from the Fanning Institute. Facilitators include past participants of community leadership programs, as well as other local volunteers.

“Young people have so much to contribute to the community, and the Youth Leadership Academy has proven to be a terrific way for them to be more involved,” said Kim Brown, former Executive Director for the Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce.

**Advancing Community Priorities**
With leadership development identified as a top priority in Pulaski County, a leadership program for youth provides an opportunity for the community to produce their own future leaders.