

Economic Development and Opportunity — First Choice in Racine

by Nancy Pierce '05

Each year, the participant teams of the Leadership Racine program take on specific challenges within the Racine community. Their goal is to support and create programs that enhance the economic stability and sustainability of our community.

One such team this year named themselves “The Dream Team”. Their focus has been economic development and opportunity. As a team they felt there was not a better way to promote and support the economic growth and development of Racine residents than by working with the First Choice Pre-Apprenticeship Program (FCPAP).

The FCPAP is located at 1437 Marquette Street under the direction of Ola Baijewu. This invaluable program provides a 14 week apprenticeship program for the segment of our population who are unemployed and are looking for careers working in the trades of construction, carpentry, manufacturing and electrical fields. The FCPAP works directly with area business to assist graduates in job placement once course work is completed.

When the team first met Ola Baijewu it was obvious that he displayed great passion and enthusiasm for mentoring people. Ola did not speak about the direct success of the program, but rather he spoke about the many successes the graduates have had with their careers. Whether Ola realizes it or not, he is a perfect example of a true servant leader.

The program’s focus is to work with our unemployed/underemployed in a format that motivates them to become self-sufficient in the workforce. To do

this, the program realized early on when working with this population, it is necessary for there to be job opportunities available to support the outcome of gainful employment. The participants are taught a number of skill sets using interactive classes. Teaching people how to be successful in getting and keeping a job, communicating with diverse populations, developing critical thinking, financial/stress management and the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse is the ideology basis of the program. Using this ideology has led to a greater success rate. “The Dream Team” has taught several of the life skill sets which provided them with direct insight into how the program is working.

“The Dream Team” and FCPAP also determined that an innovative marketing plan would improve not only community awareness, but especially awareness in the business community. The program is based on the business community knowing of the program and supporting it with job opportunities for the participants. To that end, “The Dream Team” has updated the business/program brochures and created a promotional DVD.

Given the current economic challenges the community is facing, programs such as FCPAP are very useful for community sustainability and positioning Racine for future growth. Who made up this team? Members are: Vickie Adams, Gateway Technical College, Rebecca Alvarado, Time Warner Cable,



Dolores Hernandez, Racine/Kenosha CAA Head Start, Pam (Jensen) Scheffler, Monarch Plastics and Sara Nicholson, Warren Eye Care.

Yet, “The Dream Team” focus area is just one of 5 areas this year’s Leadership Racine class has worked on. The others are:

- Culture and the Arts
- Parks and Recreation
- Image of Racine
- Children and Youth

In May, Leadership Racine graduated another great class and now, Executive Director Karen Bayer begins the preparation for the next class. Recruitment is on going. Take a moment; is there a place for you, your company, your organization in Leadership Racine? As we serve each other, we serve Racine to continue its growth into a great city to live in.

