

Va. leadership web in the works

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Nov. 18--In her own community, Susan B. Horne has leadership roles. She is vice mayor of the town of Leesburg and president and chief executive officer of Leadership Fairfax Inc.

And for two days in each of past seven months she got a look at some of the issues facing other regions of Virginia as a member of the 2006 class of Lead Virginia. The nonprofit educational program is designed to build a network of leaders with an understanding of regional issues.

"There is no other program that I'm aware of that creates this platform for a regional understanding of Virginia," Horne said this week as the class held its last meeting in Richmond.

The 42 members of Lead Virginia's 2006 class have visited Northern, southern and Southwest Virginia; Williamsburg; Hampton Roads; and the Shenandoah Valley. The group came to Richmond this week for a graduation ceremony and to study central Virginia's history and the forces shaping its future.

The two-day meeting included a tour of the Capitol and breakfast at the Executive Mansion. A meeting at the Valentine Richmond History Center focused on the economic and political forces that have shaped the region in the past half-century.

Yesterday, the group visited Owens & Minor Inc., a Hanover County-based medical-supply distributor, to learn about industries with growing regional impact, including health care, financial services and supply and distribution.

They also visited the Virginia BioTechnology Research Park downtown, home of numerous startup biotech firms and where Philip Morris USA is building a research and technology center.

Susan Timmons, Lead Virginia's president and chief executive officer, said the goal of the program is to build "social capital," linking leaders in the public and private sectors across the state to promote solutions to common problems.

One member of the class, Cherry A. Evans, director of communications and education for the Virginia Department of Aviation, said she learned that transportation, education and economic development are issues statewide, but the needs differ from region to region.

Lead Virginia's roots go back about five years, when then-Gov. Mark R. Warner challenged business leaders to develop a statewide leadership program. The program receives corporate support.