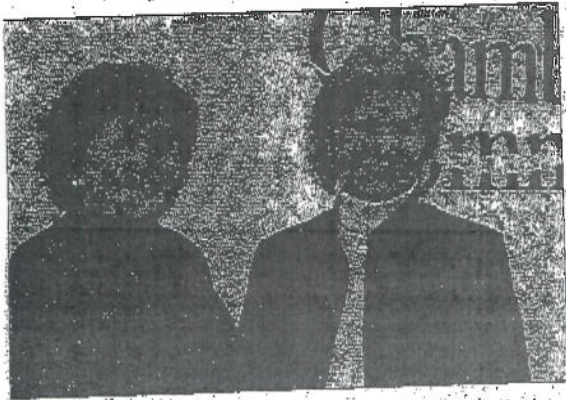


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Debbie Jones, left, president of the Prince William County Greater Manassas Chamber of Commerce with Susan Horne, president and chief executive officer of Lead Virginia. Jones graduated in November from the third Lead Virginia leadership program in Richmond.

Heidi M. Baumstark / The Bull Run Observer

Lead Virginia inspires Jones to look at area with fresh eyes

By HEIDI M. BAUMSTARK
Observer staff

Deborah L. Jones plans to apply her newly gained knowledge on how to Lead Virginia to her role as president of the Prince William County Greater Manassas Chamber of Commerce. Jones graduated from the Lead Virginia leadership program, which brings leaders together from around the state to learn about the differing issues facing each region, she explained.

About 40 senior-level Virginia executives, from various sizes of businesses, economic development agencies, local and state government officials, education and non-profits attend each class, according to a chamber statement.

Jones, who has been chamber president since 1993, graduated in November from the third Lead Virginia class. "I was the only chamber person to participate in this course; others came from the business, education or nonprofit organization sectors. I very much appreciate the board's allowing me to take this course," Jones said.

The program stretched from April to November, with a one-

month break. The group met for intense monthly sessions in different areas, starting in Williamsburg and concluding in Norfolk. The leaders also visited South Boston, Staunton, the Tyson's Corner area and Abingdon. Speakers touched on the basic structures of a region: its economy, education and transportation issues.

To get a feel for the wide variety Virginia offers, Jones explained, "While in Norfolk, we went on the ship USS Eisenhower, in Staunton, we had dinner at a Mennonite farm." The group learned about the differing needs and strengths spanning the Commonwealth and how each region's uniqueness shapes its needs and what it can offer. For example, in South Boston, an old tobacco warehouse has been renovated into a center for the arts called The Pottery.

"This is similar to the Center for the Arts in Old Town Manassas, which was an old candy factory, now transformed into an arts facility," Jones said. Centers such as these reveal how some areas are incorporating their heritage into a useful commodity without losing a region's special feel and character.

One of the program's goals is to create a nonpartisan group of informed leaders who can share a passionate vision for Virginia's future, Jones noted.

Jones, who has been a Prince William County resident since the early 1980s, said the program "connected me to a wider network of people to tap into. Sharing ideas of what's working and not working around the state helps generate ideas to enhance our area of Prince William County," Jones recommended the program to anyone who wants to make a difference in Virginia.

Lead Virginia is recruiting leaders for the 2008 class. More information is available online at www.leadvirginia.org or by calling 804-237-1461.

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Can You Lead Virginia?

Living in LoCo

By LoudounExtra.com staff at 3:23 p.m., January 3, 2008

LoudounExtra.com – Washington Post

From Living in LoCo correspondent Erica Garman:

If you are a proven senior-level leader in government, business, non-profit or education, and you'd like to share your talents and gain insight into issues that affect the commonwealth, you may want to check out Lead Virginia.

The president and CEO of Lead Virginia is Leesburg Vice Mayor Susan Horne. According to Horne, participants attend seven intense sessions throughout the year at various Virginia locations, addressing regional differences, similarities and public policies for the state's greater good.

The program is endorsed and designed by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce with the intent of developing and growing a network of statewide leaders.

One way Lead Virginia hopes to reach this goal is by developing "social capital" among its participants. Kenneth Ruscio, president of Washington and Lee University and an active member of Lead Virginia's Board of Directors describes social capital as "that intangible resource in modern society that enables people to come together in an environment of trust in order to promote the common good."

Virginia is widely known for its NoVa (Northern Virginia) v. RoVa (Rest of Virginia) conflict, but in actuality each of Virginia's several regions has its own distinct strengths, problems and agendas. By developing this "social capital" statewide, leaders from the different regions of Virginia can hopefully establish relationships to forge a stronger, unified commonwealth.

Approximately 40 participants are selected by a committee of Lead Virginia's Board of Directors. Jan. 15 is the application deadline for the upcoming class of 2008.