



Ozarks Area Community Action Corporation

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PRESS RELEASE

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STEP UP TO LEADERSHIP GRADUATES CELEBRATE COMPLETION OF LEADERSHIP TRAINING

May 3, 2011, Branson, MO – Ozarks Area Community Action Corporation (OACAC) congratulates the 14 graduates of the 2011 Step Up to Leadership Class (SUTL) who celebrated at the Grand Plaza Hotel on May 2, 2011. After 12-weeks of intensive study, the graduates are ready to put their leadership training to the test by serving on nonprofit boards, become active in community projects, volunteer for charitable causes and empower others to succeed. The prevailing theme of the celebration was ‘the possibility to make a difference in their communities is now in their hands’.

Carl Rosenkranz, Executive Director of OACAC greeted the graduates and gave them encouragement to believe in themselves and their new knowledge. Rosenkranz is able to offer a unique perspective of working in the non-profit sector as he has been employed at OACAC nearly 40 years and has served as Executive Director for 37 years. Judge Blankenship, Circuit Court Judge for Stone County also shared how his involvement in 4-H and Missouri Boys State as a young boy put him on the road to service and leadership. Judge Blankenship’s role with Missouri Boys State has transformed from student to leader as he now serves in a volunteer staff position.

Some of the students from Stone and Taney Counties signed up for the course because they wanted to learn how to write a grant. Some wanted to learn how to channel their passion into helping others by learning more about leadership skills. Whatever their reason for joining the class, in the end they all agreed that their vision and sense of self-confidence was expanded and they gained a new appreciation for their community.

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Step Up to Leadership, an award-winning leadership training program, targets low-income individuals who have a passion and want to make a difference. It is for individuals who are willing to assume the responsibilities of board membership, and for people who want to take on the challenge of leadership. It is available in Stone and Taney Counties through a partnership between Ozarks Area Community Action Corporation and University of Missouri Extension. The twelve week course is designed for individuals who have the desire to get involved in their communities, but are unsure of how to go about it.

The “Step Up to Leadership” course is hands-on learning. “Participants are encouraged to share their experiences and learn from one another,” said Wayne Dietrich, Community Development Specialist with University of Missouri Extension. “By the second or third class there is a strong bond that forms as they begin to rely on each other. It is very fulfilling and one of my favorite programs to be involved in,” he added.

“Enrolling in the classes is a big commitment,” said Dietrich. “With family and job commitments, students often struggle to make it to all 12 classes. But they persevered and I have the utmost admiration for the graduates.”

“The makeup of the students is always diverse”, said Zana Schafer, Supervisor of the Stone County Neighborhood Center. During the course of the class students will learn how to write a grant proposal to start their own community project. Two grants at \$500 each were awarded at the graduation ceremony on May 2, 2011.

One \$500 award was awarded to Laurie Bilyeu and Sean Thompson to support the existing Stone County Drug Court Alumni program. The alumni group was started three years ago when a former Step Up to Leadership Graduate won a grant and started the group. The following year, another SUTL graduate won a grant and used the money to turn the support group into a non-profit organization. Bilyeu and Thompson will continue to work to secure the 501C (3) not-for-profit status so they can start receiving donations to support the group. They also plan to focus on community awareness so the public knows about this valuable resource.

The second grant was awarded to Debra Loftin who will use the money to buy traps for low-income families to help control the feral cat population that has exploded in the area. Loftin will work with the local Humane Society and will involve Girl Scouts to distribute the traps. The Girl Scouts will also provide publicity to raise awareness of the resource.

The evening ended with graduates and family members proud of their achievement and full of appreciation for the opportunities provided by OACAC and the University of Missouri Extension. Judge Blankenship encouraged them with these words, “Take responsibility for your own behavior and actions. Ask questions, ask questions, and ask questions. Remember that each role is equally valuable and always be willing to do what is needed.”

For more information about Step Up To Leadership, please contact Alice Wingo at 417-864-3448, awingo@oacac-caa.org or visit our website at www.oacac-caa.org.

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OACAC PROGRAMS:

*Neighborhood Centers, 417-873-3340; Weatherization, 417-865-7797
Housing, 417-864-3444; LIHEAP, 417- 873-3460; Family Planning, 417-864-3410;
Foster Grandparents, 417-864-3420; Head Start, 417-864-3430;*

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