



ERNEST HOOPER
COLUMNIST

Homegrown leadership builds upon its success

When Mayor Pam Iorio addressed members of Leadership Tampa Alumni last week, she implored us to take more active roles in raising the awareness of the area's most pressing issues.

"We've got to have community dialogues, and then put the leadership in Leadership Tampa," Iorio said. "You're not a networking group. It's up to all of you to provide that kind of leadership that changes the direction of our community."

The statement resonated with Colleen Chappell, vice president of Roberts Communications and 2006 chair for Leadership Tampa, because she already is spearheading an effort to address that concern for the group's nearly 700 members.

The result is a new series for Leadership Tampa members and the public in which influential leaders will discuss and answer questions about issues critical to our community and, in some cases, our world.

It kicks off Monday at 5:30 p.m. in the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center's Jaeb Theater. Conversations with Influence will feature U.S. attorney and Tampa resident Greg Kehoe, who is leading the trial of Saddam Hussein.

Chappell likes to refer to the program as continuing education for members.

"To be a good leader and have an impact, you have to have knowledge," Chappell said. "You have to have access to influencers so you can directly communicate with them on key issues."

"I think this first session we're having is going to be an incredible opportunity to have a direct conversation with someone who is involved with something that is impacting our world."

Unlike other programs, this forum is branded differently. Kehoe will be interviewed by former Tampa attorney Shannon Bream, a weekend morning anchor for NBC's Washington, D.C., affiliate. The two will sit on stage together, conversing in a setting similar to *Larry King Live*.

Audience members also will get a chance to ask questions.

Kehoe, who has told reporters he has "come to understand the face of evil," will talk about his role in the Hussein trial, as well as his views on the efforts in Iraq.

Future leaders have not been determined, but Chappell is promising a provocative list of community and statewide leaders.

"We're not endorsing any particular views," Chappell said. "We don't want to tell our members what to think. We want to tell them what to think about."

As a member of Leadership Tampa's class of 2003, I expect it to be enlightening.

Admission is \$30 for members and \$35 for nonmembers. For more information, go to www.ltalumni.org or call (813) 276-9414.

On Thursday, I got a chance to meet a group of bright and eager teens during the Youth Alive! Career Night at Kid City, the Children's Museum of Tampa.

Youth Alive! is a teen leadership and scholarship development program, and judging from the poise of most of the kids, it's doing a pretty good job.

Certainly, I expected questions about how I got into this business (bad math grades) and how I became a columnist (divine providence). What I didn't expect was for someone to offer story ideas.

Yet one of the young men said his house of worship, Crossover Community Church, deserved some press. He described it as a "hip-hop church," and he even bated me a little bit.

"The *Tribune* has already written about it," Eddie Santiago said.

Unfortunately, for Eddie, the *Times* also has had a story about Crossover, but that doesn't mean I'm ruling out visiting there in the future.

I'm not sure what was more impressive: the fact he had a good story idea or the fact he was bragging about his church.

Overall, it was a group eager to hear what I had to say and even more optimistic about the future. I don't think you can ever underestimate the impact of such encounters with our young people.

When I was their age, I was working for the high school newspaper in Tallahassee when Ed Bradley of CBS spoke at Florida A&M. My mom took me to the press conference, and I nervously stood up and asked, "How do you think blacks will vote in the election?"

Bradley responded by saying, "Blacks are not a monolithic mass," but he applauded my moxie and in a tiny way, provided some inspiration that would stay with me as I made my way up the career ladder. I also found myself working "monolithic" into my conversations.

I'll never know if my brief moments at Kid City will make a difference, but I know what a chance encounter did for me oh-so many years ago.

That's all I'm saying.

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