



I read with great interest the recent article by Dr. Cheryl Carter, Executive Director, *Leadership Montgomery*, titled: *Leadership Montgomery helps feed children*. In the discussion, Dr. Carter noted that one of the project committees developed a program to feed homeless children in the Montgomery Public School System. That team was one of several outstanding teams in Class XXIX: I was a member of that class and on the team that designed the *FoodForKidsMontgomery* Project. That project continues today and is making a significant difference in the lives of children who would otherwise struggle for their next meal on weekends. I love to talk about this project because it positively impacts lives! But, allow me to digress ‘to the rest of the story.’

My wife and I have been residents of Montgomery for nearly 30 years. In these years, I have been an educator, community volunteer, contributor to charities, and my wife and I have raised a daughter, now a granddaughter, and soon—a grandson. Originally from Georgia, Montgomery is now our home.

In the years we have lived here, I have participated in many service projects, taught literally hundreds of students, and earned my doctorate. Yet, I—like many citizens of Montgomery—was ‘generally aware’ of what goes on in the city that I now love and call home. For example, I (like many others) understood certain areas of the city better than others because I worked in those areas or served on committees for other services. Then, in 2011, a colleague of mine informed me of Leadership Montgomery. She provided a nomination for me to apply. However, it didn’t occur to me at the time the depth of what I was about to encounter.

During years of military service, sitting in classrooms to earn degrees, and professional development, I have encountered a considerable array of leadership development theories and applications. I have also come to think of the most profound leadership style as servant leader, whereby the individual is a person of strength, exceptional leadership, moral fortitude, and a well-informed, decision-maker—yet, this person achieves goals and outcomes to serve those they lead, improve the lives of others, and promote organizational success. These leadership characteristics are well-defined and exceptionally well-applied in Leadership Montgomery classes, projects, and outcomes.

Leadership Montgomery is an intensive 9-month program that impacts your life as few programs do. It challenges you to personally step out of your comfort zone and evaluate your responsibilities as a citizen of Montgomery. Bobby Kennedy once said, “There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why... I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?” This statement epitomizes a core question that each citizen of Montgomery should ask himself or herself. The easier part of this profound statement is to simply ask: Why are things like they are in Montgomery? Or, we can look at how our city

functions, and ask: Why not? Why not seek to become a cleaner place to live; why not work together as citizens to fight crime each and every time it rears its ugly head; why not support our law enforcement for all the right and good that it does; why not foster the well-being of all citizens so that Montgomery is a place where life is worthy to be lived here; and, why not stop all the tearing down, and instead build up one another as neighbors-helping-neighbors?

Leadership Montgomery deals with these questions by analyzing services and outcomes in Montgomery not simply to ask why, but to seek the overarching and innovative answers to ‘why not?’ It fosters creative bonds of teamwork, whereby participants in the nearly year-long program are tasked with thinking about their city in ways heretofore unchallenged or previously not considered for investigation. The program instilled in each one of us the challenge to consider what we might do individually, and collectively, as future city leaders or servants—whether in community service, building projects, politics, serving on boards, funding drives, developing or leading neighborhood programs, or wherever/whenever we may be called to serve—to improve the lives of each and every citizen in Montgomery.

The fundamental principles that form the linchpin between Leadership Montgomery and the community of Montgomery is based on a premise in Physics: “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Let it be stated this way: If you build it, they will come (Movie: *Field of Dreams*). The projects developed and implemented by the Leadership Montgomery teams are individual *Field of Dreams* that bridge “the action and the [opposite] reaction.” In other words, the team projects are designed to be all inclusive in areas of need throughout the City of Montgomery to bring hope, services, support, and innovative ideas to the community.

Leadership Montgomery guides its yearly classes to investigate how Montgomery actually works—not from a distant birds-eye view, but from a holistically drilled-down view, to assess elements of the overall process and design projects to improve the lives of all citizens. In other words, as team members, we were asked to think in terms of: Why not? The goal of each project was to review what is or what needs to be and ask why not; why not make improvements, why not work together to solve problems, why not challenge one another to respect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; why not work to foster positive racial relations; why not fight crime with all our strength and with all our might; why not produce an educated group of young minds; and, why not make tomorrow better than today, one day at a time, one life at a time, and one city at a time—beginning right here in Montgomery, Alabama.

I developed some friendships that will remain with me for the rest of my life. I’ve learned about their lives and understand that our lives have so many things in common; yet, our lives across the city are so different that we often forget that we are not islands within the boundaries of the city limits, we are but one among many. While we tarry to earn a living to provide for our families, we are dependent on one

another for many things; yet, we each have the responsibility to be initiators for positive outcomes in our lives. The Leadership Montgomery program asked us as participants to remember that we are not separated from others in the city, but we each have a responsibility to be motivated to care for ourselves as well as others. For example, to be responsive to the job market, it is my personal and professional responsibility to ensure that I obtain an education, participate in professional development, become a diligent team player, and do what I am reasonably able to do within the realm of community service. Leadership Montgomery addresses these personal and professional aspects of living in Montgomery, but from a leadership perspective so that once I had completed the program, I was not graduating from Leadership Montgomery, but graduating into service as an alumni of Leadership Montgomery—in other words, servant leadership or service to help my fellow citizens throughout the city.

You might be saying to yourself as you read this: “He sounds like a commercial for Leadership Montgomery.” If it sounds as if I ‘wax philosophical’, then let the shoe fit because I don’t mind wearing it. Machiavelli, whether you agree with his views or not, noted something so profound that to miss its intent is to miss a life-altering truth: “It ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.” This last statement is spot on for Leadership Montgomery. The projects that it develops can be seen across the city, and when you see the commercial on TV identifying Montgomery as “*The Capital of Dreams*”, you are witnessing a project outcome from one of the past classes in Leadership Montgomery—a superb program that makes a huge difference to Montgomery in ways that people may not even realize!

The new order of things in this context is to build, not tear down; improve, not allow dysfunction; truly care for one another, not build walls of separation; embrace a city, not find excuse for blame without justification, but to properly seek the righting-of-wrongs; political service for those you serve, not political gain so others must serve you; obeying the laws because this is right, not doing whatever you want, the law be damned; community service to help your fellow citizens, not hoping your fellow citizens will take care of community service so you don’t have to get involved; and, the opportunity for service is endless. Leadership Montgomery addresses these and many other issues in full-length class days that truly opens your eyes to the work by volunteer groups, charities, city-service organizations, and so forth.

At the end of the Leadership Montgomery Class XXIX in 2013, I understood the city that I have come to enjoy and call home to a significantly new level. I enrolled in Leadership Montgomery because it sounded to me like an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the city in which I work, play, raise a family, and will one day reside eternally. What I received was more than I could have imagined, from Orientation to Graduation. It opened my mind to how Montgomery works, interacts, supports the needs of

the homeless and less fortunate, and so much more that I would need at least a book to describe it all. I graduated into Leadership Montgomery as a better citizen for myself, my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my friends, and for the citizens of Montgomery that I haven't even met.

As I read Dr. Cheryl Carter's letter, I thought about the smiling faces of those students with their backpacks on each Friday as they prepared to depart for the weekend. Leadership Montgomery was the catalyst for that project and hungry children would be fed while away from their respective schools. I vividly recall every session we had with city and state leaders and community support groups; in every session, I left with an understanding of how all these units formed a cohesive layer of support for the citizens of Montgomery, and the State of Alabama. To say that Leadership Montgomery changed my life sounds passé, but it's true. And this program continues to make a positive difference in lives, city services, citizen outcomes, and holistically for the City of Montgomery.

Recently, Lt. Gen Steven Kwast assumed command of Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base. In meeting with community leaders, he made the comment that, "You have got some of the best thinkers in the world right here." While he was referring to Air Force leadership and personnel, the same is true right here in Montgomery, Alabama, on the civilian side of the equation: "You have got some of the best thinkers in the world right here—in Leadership Montgomery." If Leadership Montgomery were to no longer exist or be reduced to a shell of its former self, the City of Montgomery would be a lesser place because of it. Without the classes, teams, and projects, Montgomery would lose a precious and motivating force that impacts those who live in the city in ways that most people don't even realize. Without Leadership Montgomery, I would have missed one of the most profound experiences of my life—to learn about Montgomery as I could never have imagined—as a place of unlimited potential, a place to set down roots for generations to come, and to make life-long friends. A place I call home.

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Leadership Montgomery, Class XXIX