

Lila A. Jaber: Leadership Florida: building a better state

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In three decades, Florida has blossomed from a significant state of about 10 million residents to a bustling mega-state of almost 19 million. In part, this transformation has been guided by Leadership Florida, a nonprofit organization that develops leaders with a statewide, rather than parochial, view of Florida's needs — all for the purpose of making Florida a better place in which to live and prosper.

As members of the 30th class of Leadership Florida wrap up their sessions, I am pleased to take the opportunity to congratulate the Leadership Florida staff, led by Wendy Abberger, and all of our 1,500-plus members for their dedication to this organization and, most importantly, to our state.

The strength of this respected organization is in its nonpartisanship — or, perhaps more accurately, its multi-partisanship and in its diversity.

Leadership Florida brings together leaders from diverse industries, communities, philosophies and perspectives. For 30 years, Leadership Florida has successfully convened leaders in order to educate them on the critical issues facing our state and to motivate them toward finding solutions to build a better state for all. By building trust and alliances within this group of leaders, Leadership Florida helps produce a better future for all of Florida.

From industry CEOs and presidents of nonprofits to the university presidents and government officials, "Leadership Florida is leadership in Florida."

The ability to take a statewide perspective to pressing issues would be enough, by itself, to establish Leadership Florida as an indispensable resource. But the value doesn't stop there.

I have heard class members describe how they began the Leadership Florida process thinking of themselves as Miamians or Tallahasseeans or Pensacolans, and now — thanks to their involvement in Leadership Florida — they see themselves as Floridians. In a state where only 30 percent of us were born here and Pensacola is only slightly closer to Key West than it is to Chicago, creating a sense of unity and cohesion is truly something significant.

Beyond that, the sense of community from diversity distinguishes Leadership Florida from any other organization in the state. Consider that the last four chairs of Leadership Florida cover the ethnic, political and religious landscape, and last year's class included natives of Spain, Serbia, South Africa, the Philippines, Pakistan and Cuba, not to mention numerous states across the U.S.

For 30 years, Leadership Florida and its members have built bridges across the divides of heritage, geography and political philosophy. To Leadership Florida, I say congratulations and happy anniversary.

I feel privileged for having the opportunity to serve this wonderful organization.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information on Leadership Florida, go to <http://www.leadershipflorida.org>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lila A. Jaber, chair of Leadership Florida for 2011-12, is a shareholder in the government affairs section of the Gunster Law Firm, based in Tallahassee.