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## Leadership Cleveland at 40: Lifting local leaders

With its 40th class in tow, Leadership Cleveland doesn't plan to slow down

By Jeremy Nobile



Illustration by Daniel Zacroczeński for Crain's

For Roz Quarto, a graduate of Leadership Cleveland's 2015 class, an interaction with inmates at the Cuyahoga County Jail, which

### LEADERSHIP CLEVELAND BY THE NUMBERS

**30:** Members in the inaugural class of 1978

**65:** members in the 40th anniversary class of 2018

**2,287:** alumni

**156:** LC alumni have completed at least one other CLC program

**32%:** Percentage of all CLC program alumni who are Leadership Cleveland alumni

**1,000+:** Organizations with alumni

### DIVERSITY NUMBERS

**50%:** Women

**21%:** Non-white

**55%:** For-profit

**19%:** Community/nonprofit

**9%:** Government

**8%:** Education

**8%:** Health

was part of the civic-minded program, was one of many that she says "rocked my world."

Quarto, a lawyer from New York, was part of a selection committee for the 2014 Gay Games. A little before then, she closed her practice and moved to Cleveland with her wife, who helped her learn about programs offered through the Cleveland Leadership Center for people new to the area.

Having worked with homeless and neighborhood development in New York, she was highly motivated to become similarly engaged with her new community in Northeast Ohio.

Through LC — the leadership development and civic education program now housed alongside other similar programs at the CLC — Quarto fast-tracked her path to community service here.

But that session at the jail, which was part of the 10-month-long LC program, really resonated with her.

Quarto, now the executive director for Cleveland's Empowering and Strengthening Ohio's People, a nonprofit housing and financial counseling agency, met with pregnant inmates at the jail to hear about their issues and concerns. It was among a slew of other sessions, which included poverty simulations and seminars on community development issues.

"I think it changed a lot of people's world views," said Quarto of the LC seminars, who represented nonprofits on an economic development team in her class.

For Quarto — and others among the nearly 2,300 LC alumni — it cemented not only her commitment to the nonprofit sector here, but her identity as a Clevelander.

## **Broadening horizons**

LC has a long history in Northeast Ohio's civic fabric and business community.

The program has been around for decades, launching its 40th class, with 65 participants, this month. The first class graduated in 1978. **(Here is a list of this year's participants)**

The CLC itself formed in 2006 with the combination of four programs, including LC and Cleveland Bridge Builders. The CLC now offers six programs in total, each with a mission of education and civic engagement targeting people at different stages of their lives and careers from teenage students to mid- and senior-level professionals to retirees.

"The original vision, and continuing vision, is to create this continuum of leadership offerings from high school to hip replacement," said CLC president and CEO Marianne Crosley. "We all have to work collaboratively if we're going to make a difference. And that's really why all of this was formed."

LC is arguably the flagship program of the CLC. It targets senior-level workers in virtually all disciplines, from public and private sectors to government and nonprofits.

It's a collaborative place where corporate bankers, food bankers and land bankers can come together to address community issues.

The overall goal is to foster a network among influential citizens, hone their leadership acumen and arm them not only with a hunger for civic engagement, but with a sense of how to address community-wide issues.

In that sense, over 40 years, the mission of the LC really hasn't changed, said Bruce Akers, president of the LC's inaugural class and former Pepper Pike mayor. Akers said an overarching theme of that first class was addressing racial divisiveness among Cleveland suburbs and population loss.

"If anything, it exposed me to some aspects of the cities I didn't appreciate as much at the time," Akers said. "It broadened my horizons."

It did the same for Quarto.

Quarto's subgroup, which included MetroHealth CEO Akram Boutros, listened to complaints about maternity care at the county jail, particularly as it related to the nurses. At the time, MetroHealth only provided physicians, nurse practitioners and physician-assistant services, so the nurses in question didn't actually work for the hospital. Since then, however, MetroHealth has taken control of overall health care services at the jail.

At the time of the visit, though, it wasn't immediately obvious the inmates were talking to the head of a hospital with considerable control over those services.

"(Boutros) said here is who I am and here is how I'm going to fix this," Quarto said.

Boutros recalled one young woman in particular who said staff were disrespectful and made her feel uncared for.

"I don't and didn't see the young lady as an inmate," he said.

"Rather, she's a patient who deserved the very best of care we can

offer. I was not surprised, but was sad and upset at the staff."

He told the sheriff he expected things to change or the hospital would discontinue services there.

For Boutros, who does those kinds of interviews with patients routinely, that interaction isn't wholly unique.

But for others, like Quarto, it was one of many ways LC exposed civic leaders to people and issues they might not otherwise be familiar with.

And it was that experience in the program in general that connected her with influential leaders like Boutros, exposed her to community issues and ways to address them and generally empowered her civic mentality in Northeast Ohio.

The event at the jail was just one instance that Quarto found enlightening, she said.

"At the end of Leadership Cleveland, I learned about the nuance in understanding how Cleveland works and found my commitment to, while I'm living here, making Cleveland a better place than I found it," Quarto said. "I'm most certainly a better leader because of it. And underlying it all, it made me a Clevelander."

## **Another 40 years**

Not to be understated is how the program connects people together. When LC grads need expertise on how to address a challenge in their own business or other endeavor, or when they need their board seats filled, they often fall back to friends in their LC network. Quarto, for instance, is now the chair of a civilian police review board. She was asked to join because her LC participation marked her as a civically interested Clevelander.

By networking across disciplines, though, participants benefit from connections that could not only benefit them personally, but, the hope is, bridge people together to address wider community issues. It creates a "cadre of committed citizens," Akers said. And while individuals are bound to have their own causes to champion, the LC helps connect everyone through similar goals.

"The challenges of losing population was affecting 57 political subdivisions," Akers said of Cleveland's issues in the 1970s. "There were other groups and organizations addressing these issues. But the uniqueness of this thing is having a group of leaders from these various disciplines coming together and asking how can we solve this?"

Paul Clark, Cleveland market president for PNC Bank, is a non-LC alum who supports the program and CLC. The bank itself has seen several graduates of the program and is a major donor to the CLC.

"Leadership Cleveland, and the Cleveland Leadership Center, is the thread that connects so many people in our community," he said. "Organizations can develop leaders vertically, but programs such as this connect leaders across our community and help to develop networks of individuals, often times with similar passions, to work together to make our community great."

And all of that has shaped the community and made it stronger, he said.

"There's no doubt they're an asset to the community," Clark added.

Upon graduation, that 1978 class was "pumped up and ready to change the world," Akers said.

Today's graduates convey a similar feeling.

"It's one of the reasons I think Northeast Ohio is able to rise and meet challenges," said Kristin Warzocha, president and CEO of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, a CLC board member and grad of the LC class of 2010. "It provides a springboard for community service and helps people understand the need to do even more."

The tuition- and donor-funded CLC has seen its budget stabilize in recent years at around \$1.6 million. It has the resources to continue another 40 years.

But outside of tailoring programs and their focuses to address the evolving needs of the Greater Cleveland community — a recent class, for example, focused on how the city uses its water resources, which resulted in the development of the Cleveland Metroparks Water Taxi that moves people between east and west banks of the Flats — not much has changed with the LC program itself.

The mission has not changed.

And the approach to that mission of creating more civic-minded leaders in tune with the pulse of what ails the community and what it needs to thrive and support its citizenry, seems to be working.

"I think we have 40 years of testimony on this: what they're doing is right on target," Akers said. "Expanding and exposing the LC to other aspects of leadership is the right thing to do. We've had great success and that will only continue."

"And that's why all this will last another 40 years."

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