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Class XLII
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The Best Part of ALF

The best part of the American Leadership Forum (ALF) is the relationships. My ALF classmates are all dear friends, even family at this point. Today they are people who can call on me and those who I can call upon. They are such great people who have achieved such greatness in their work and they are ready to give back. Through these enriched relationships, there are countless collaborative efforts that we can create to make the world a better place. Everybody is sharpening everyone else for the common good. What a great organization!

Key Lessons from ALF

One key point emerging in our ALF class was uncovering the universality that everyone, regardless of their background, religion, country of origin, or otherwise, all care about the same things. They all want a better life for themselves, their children and those that they care about.

I was reaffirmed in my belief, “it always starts with trust”. First we have to trust one another. If someone doesn’t trust you, then anything that comes out of your mouth doesn’t matter. If we treat each other fairly and with respect, and show people that we care, others are much more likely to listen to what we have to say. I also heard my classmates share that they especially want to trust the people that are responsible for public service, like those in law enforcement and city government. These things seem to be common among us.

In our ALF class, we shared experiences learning about each other’s lives and perspectives. We each came to ALF with our own views and notions of the world. If we only rely on what we’ve seen via social media or news organizations and haven’t walked with people from other backgrounds, we can’t possibly know what their perspective is like. ALF provides people the opportunity to be around others with different perspectives. Short of having had that opportunity, they might fall back on a preset notion based only on their own experiences. Without a doubt, we witnessed in each other change in thought and attitude. Where each may have previously felt like she or he saw the world clearly, now that person had other people’s first hand experiences to call upon. It was fantastic to witness a transformation in my classmates as we learned about each other’s experiences and committed to each other in our mission to make the world better.

ALF Impact

ALF is impacting our citizenry and our community by bringing leaders together and giving them opportunities to share ideas and to experience each other’s lives. ALF is like a microcosm of the total population. When you bring people together from all walks of life and they share their life stories and experiences, it creates opportunities for each of us to take their experiences back into our own communities. By sharing different perspectives we are planting seeds. Each of us is now empowered to go back into our communities and cultivate these seeds. We might even bring new thoughts to other people that may only have one view and may not consider others challenges and concerns. If we really listen to others and share their knowledge, we can hopefully grow new opportunities. Things that grow in that manner really take root. Those deep roots help propel ideas and values that will hopefully impact other lives in other powerful ways.

ALF provides ongoing opportunities to share, listen, talk about concerns the community may have. Through classes and community dialogues, ALF is very successful bringing people into the loop and into the dialogue.

Personally, ALF helped to connect me with other like-minded individuals who embrace the public servant attitude. Because of ALF, my network of friends and confidants has grown and because of that it makes me a better person. We all have so much work to do as servant leaders. The feeling that ALF provides, that “we are all in this together”, energizes me even more. I don’t feel that the weight of the world is only on me. We will always have a lot to do but now I have more people on the team that I know personally to get things done.

ALF Network

Being a part of the ALF network means we have a network of people that have our backs. The whole goal is ultimately for all of us together to improve everyone’s quality of life. The value of the network is that people can call on me when someone is in need and together we can get things done and advance society. I am a “rising tide” kind of person. If we work together to help even those who are most vulnerable, everyone benefits from that.

ALF Scholarships

When I was first approached about being a part of ALF, I thought it was wonderful to be nominated, however, almost in the same breath I understood that there was a fee to participate and that cost might create problems for my participation. I was delighted to have a scholarship awarded to me so that cost would not create a barrier for my participation.

I hope to help develop future leaders so they can grow and create ideas to build a better world around them. Scholarship money gives future Senior Fellows that ability. I don’t want anything to prevent leaders from participating in ALF and building relationships like I have, to advance the common good. That is critical and I would not give that up. It is wonderful to be able to help the next person participate in ALF. That is very important.

My Responsibilities

In my current role, I oversee the Homeland Security Command for the Houston Police Department. My responsibilities include efforts to prevent foreign and domestic terrorism and to counter extremist attitudes and behaviors. Just this past weekend, Labor Day weekend, I was tasked with overseeing safety at the 55th Annual Islamic Society of North America. The three day convention took place at the George R. Brown Convention Center and is one of the largest gatherings of Muslims (more than 30,000) in North America focusing on faith and positive change to inspire communities around the world. I oversaw the team responsible for monitoring and securing the event and maintaining public safety and order outside the event as armed protest groups both in support of the ISNA and opposed to it squared off in front of the GRB. This summer, I also had the great privilege to join a group of high level leaders in police departments from across the country to travel to Israel. We learned from both the Israeli Police and the Israeli Defense Force about the ways that they go about protecting their citizens. We also traveled into the West Bank and listened to the Palestinian Authority Police Chief for the West Bank on their challenges and how they protect the public. It was a fascinating trip and provided insight for all of us into the complexities of maintaining safety in their region of the world.

My responsibilities are very broad as the Assistant Chief of Homeland Security. I oversee the Tactical Operations Division, the Special Operations Division, the Air & Marine Division, and both Bush

International and Hobby International Airport Divisions. These divisions represent hundreds of highly trained men and women with specialized equipment dedicated to protecting the public. It is an honor to serve with them, my HPD family, and all the men and women around the world trying to make it safer and improve every person's quality of life. In addition to combatting violent crime and extremism, we have a role in emergency management and natural disasters. Within the divisions I am blessed to oversee are our high water rescue teams, vehicles, and boats, our SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) team, bomb squad, dive team, K9 unit, Mounted Patrol, Helicopter, lake patrol, marine unit, and crowd control. I also have partners throughout the region. Together, we look at potential problems that can impact our citizens and build relationships to help others in need.

I used to oversee the gang division and saw the need to become even more involved in our vulnerable communities. I see violent crime as a threat to our homeland, like anything else and will continue to work with my colleagues to reduce violent crime in our city. It kills me when we lose so many young men and women to violence. A lot of our youth, teenagers, early 20 year olds, are losing their lives on the streets of Houston due to violent crime. We are currently short on staff, but we are applying as much technology as possible to assist us with our efforts. We're also recruiting some citizens in our neighborhoods to do more in terms of moving our youth in another direction and away from violence. We are partnering with them, making them our eyes and ears, working together.

We also have a citizen's police academy which is a 10 week program, where folks meet once a week to learn about all of the functions of law enforcement. This program helps citizens understand the challenges that law enforcement faces and helps us build relationships in communities. This type of community police partnership creates an opportunity for law enforcement officials to talk with individuals in the citizen's academy and hear what they are saying. This communication provides insight into issues and allows us to adjust some of the things we do. We also do this to build trust. Without trust, nothing we say will matter. First is to trust the messenger, then the message can be heard.