

Second Ford Family Leadership Class Graduates

By Scott Laird

Twenty-seven Vernonia area residents graduated from the second Ford Institute Leadership Program (FILP) on May 12. The class participants were nominated by a committee of community members, and were chosen based on previous community involvement and leadership potential. The class included six high school students, and was held at the Vernonia Community Learning Center (VCLC).

The training took place over four weekends throughout the spring of 2007. Participants learned about personality types and how they affect the way people work in groups through the Myers-Briggs test. Other highlights were: dealing with change, decision-making tools, meeting structures, effective communication, conflict resolution and project planning. "I will be more involved and aware of my chance to make a difference," said graduate Jack Lindsley. "I think our community will become more alive and involved," noted Vernonia High School student Celia Gendron.

The group is required to choose and complete a project that benefits their community, and allows them to practice and use the skills and tools learned during the training.

The class chose as their project, the design and completion of the VCLC courtyard as a community garden that will be open to the public. The garden

will be an educational extension of the Learning Center, featuring a rustic theme with elements of timber history and a focus on native plants. The group has begun fund raising with a yard work raffle and a quilt raffle, and has other fund raisers planned. The Ford Family Foundation (FFF), sponsors of the program, grant the project \$5,000 to assist with the completion of the project, while asking for matching funds from the group.

The class was lead by Vernita Ediger, a professional trainer from Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) with assistance from volunteer community trainers Donna Webb, Brett Costley, Sally Harrison and Scott Laird. All the community trainers are prior graduates of the 2005 FILP.

The Ford Institute for Community Building makes a five-year commitment to rural communities. This includes the four-month community leadership training series in the first, third, and fifth years. They also provide in-depth trainings on Creating Effective Organizations in the second year, and Community Collaborations to address shared problems and opportunities in the fourth year. All of these trainings, as well as additional technical support are provided free of charge to the communities, through funding from the Ford Family Foundation.

Vernonia School Superintendent Ken Cox appre-

ciated the value of the materials presented. "Our community will have a larger pool of trained leaders that can help us move forward as a community." He also noted what he considered to be the most valuable tool learned, "The importance of getting involved with the community as a whole."

Local community organizations that were represented by participants in this years class include the Pioneer Museum, Vernonia Pride, Friends of the Library, PEO, Vernonia Grange, Hands On Art, Lions Club, Vernonia Cares, VCLC, Vernonia Ridge Riders, various churches, school teams and organizations.

The intention is that class participants will take their knowledge back to their organizations and improve their effectiveness. "It has helped me see organizational potential to re-energize my group," stated Janelle Thomas-Cedergreen. There is the potential that this class will continue to work together as a group on other community projects and may even collaborate with the first FILP class.

At the graduation ceremony participants and trainers expressed gratitude to the Ford Family Foundation for their commitment to Vernonia. "I believe that the FILP is creating just that - leaders for Vernonia. People who care and want to make Vernonia a better place," said Rose Curtis, about her experience in the class.

Meet the other Ford Foundation

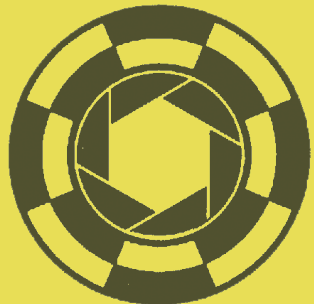
The Ford Family Foundation (FFF) was developed from the estate of Kenneth Ford who founded Roseburg Forest Products. In 1957, Kenneth and Hallie Ford established a modest foundation to give back to the timber communities of Southwest Oregon. It grew into The Ford Family Foundation in 1996, and has its main office in Roseburg, Oregon. The mission of the FFF is to help individuals through organized learning opportunities to be contributing and successful citizens and to enhance the vitality of rural communities.

Funding for the programs comes from the FFF with training provided by the Ford Institute, who has partnered with Rural Development Initiatives to deliver the rural community training. The Ford Institute works within the framework of the foundation's core values:

- Integrity - Promoting and acknowledging principled behavior.
- Stewardship - Responsibility to give back and accountability for resources and results.
- Respect - Valuing all individuals.
- Independence - Encouraging self-reliance and initiative.
- Community - Working together for positive change.

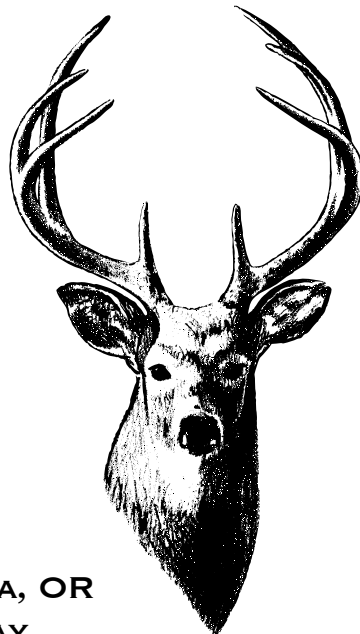
The training is based on a number of assumptions about creating community leaders. First, that leaders can be made and good leaders can be made better. A related assumption is that leadership in a community is about relationships and about engaging others. By focusing on teamwork and broad citizen engagement students learn that leadership is about helping community members create meaning and value in proposed changes. A third assumption is the importance of applying the new knowledge and skill about leadership to an immediate, real community project. All people learn best when they can make a connection between theory and practice. The fourth assumption deals with the power of positive attitudes, strong self-esteem, and community pride as part of leadership. The program teaches to build on "what works" rather than "what's wrong." Lastly there is an assumption that being an effective community leader comes from knowing oneself. Personal development is a core element in the program.

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