A Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with a Step
Class 15 walks from night-time into day

It is said that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a step.” After spending the past two years as a member of LEAD NY Class 15, I think our entire class can now validate that statement.

If I rewind to September 2013, Class 15 took their first collective step together as we headed to Camp Oswegatchie. Looking back on that trip to the Adirondacks, I believe it’s fair to say that none of us realized or truly appreciated the expedition that we had signed up for. At the end of the first evening, we had the option to go stumble around together in the woods for a night walk. A majority of the class chose to brave the dark and head out as a group. With no light from the moon, it turns out that walking in the woods without flashlights is not an easy task. Our class had to immediately learn to trust one another as we made our way through the woods, hurdling over tipped-over trees, and trying to avoid stubbing our toes on rocks.

As I reflect on this moment in time, it strikes me how appropriate an introduction to LEAD NY that night walk truly was. In many ways, prior to LEAD, I think everyone in the class knew there were ways to be a leader and attributes of a leader, but had very little training from which to draw upon. Similarly, in the woods, we knew there were paths that we were walking on, but could not easily see where we were headed.

As I write this, it has been two months since LEAD NY Class 15 held their commencement ceremony in Ithaca, NY. It was a celebration of the journey of the “thousand miles” that our class took together over the past two years. In fact, apparently it was a journey of over 50,000 miles that our class traveled together during the past 2 years as calculated by class member Chelsea Smith.

From my perspective, since that first step in Oswegatchie, the experiences during our first year in Rochester, Batavia, Syracuse, Albany, NYC and Cortland provided us an excellent basis from which to become more effective leaders. It also opened our eyes to the many opportunities to collectively work together as members of the agriculture community, and the array of opportunities available in our society today to help enrich our communities.

Year two of the program brought some bigger steps with trips to Washington D.C., Ottawa Canada, and South Africa. These experiences brought understanding of both the differences and similarities faced...
Now More Than 30 Years of Leadership Development

Please help us welcome Class 16!

We are very pleased to announce class 16 of LEAD New York. We are confident that we have selected another diverse group of aspiring leaders and we look forward to working with them in the coming months.

Members come from every corner of our state, plus two other states, and we have representation from industry sectors that we have not seen in years. This is a very strong, diverse class. Should you know or run into any of these individuals in the next few weeks, please join us in welcoming them to the program.

The guiding principal in the selection process is to try to assemble the right mix of participants in the final roster – including as much diversity as possible. As such, the new class has a 50/50 male/female split; it is dispersed from Lake Erie in the west, to Chazy in the north, to Boston in the east, and NYC to the south, with many points in between (see map right). About 1/3 of the participants are producers, 1/3 come from the for-profit agribusiness sector, and the remainder come from the not-for-profit or educational sectors. Age range of the participants is 26 – 48, and the average age of the cohort is 35 years old. This group will bring valuable, diverse perspectives to class discussions, as they represent a wide array of specific industry sectors.

As always, we encourage alumni to join the current class for a meal, tour or workshop at any of our seminars. Class members appreciate the opportunity for interaction with alumni, and alumni benefit from the networking opportunity, too! More details on each of the seminars – including a seminar agenda – can usually be found on our website (www.leadny.org) about one week prior to the seminar. Please mark your calendars with these dates, and look for the names of some of our alumni. It is unusual for me to see an issue that doesn’t mention at least one of our alumni doing something noteworthy or providing some leadership for their peers. For example, I recently learned that Linda Purdy (class 13) was elected as Chair of the Winegrape Growers of America. Congratulations, Linda!
Class 15 Fundraising Summary: Thank you for helping us exceed our fundraising goal!

The roster below represents all donations received for Class 15, with the exception of endowment contributions. The donation period represented is July 1, 2013 through June 8, 2015. If you have made a donation since this issue went to press, or we have inadvertently omitted your name, please accept our apologies. Donors in italics are LEAD alumni.

Keep in mind that as of July 1, 2015, we will begin a new class fundraising cycle, and as a result will wipe this donor roster clean. So, if you want to be recognized as a donor to Class 16, please remember to make a contribution! You should see new solicitation materials arrive later this summer, or use the donations card in this newsletter and send in your contribution today.

We sincerely appreciate your continued investment in our program. Without your support, we would not be able to continue to offer this high-quality leadership development experience to our future industry and community leaders. Thank you!

Over $50,000:
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PLAUS NOTE: All donors marked in italics are LEAD alumni or current class members. Donors in BOLD have established endowment accounts for the benefit of LEADNY. The names listed represent donations received from July 1, 2013 through June 8, 2015. If you have made a donation since then but have not inadvertently omitted your name, please accept our apologies.

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within our own country, our neighboring countries, and a country half-way around the world. In addition, our local leadership projects provided an opportunity to put some of the theory we had learned in year one into practice this year. Lessons on the value of optimism, forward thinking, and having the attitude to drive to the desired outcomes, even in the face of adversity and seemingly overwhelming obstacles, were abundant.

Finally, in our last session before commencement, we had time to decompres. It was a session which allowed the class to take in all of the things that we learned over the past two years, reflect, and truly put the final puzzle pieces provided by LEAD NY together. I could think of no better way to end the formal educational provided, than once again wandering around the woods, this time by the light of day.

Through our entire LEAD NY journey, we were encouraged to learn about ourselves, think about our communities, to understand how we fit into the bigger leadership picture. While the formal training as provided by LEAD NY has ended for Class 15, our leadership journey has really just begun as we now engage in our workplaces and our communities with the knowledge and understanding we have been provided over these past two years. I personally am very excited to see where my own personal journey will unfold from here.

Now that Class 15 has concluded our formal education, the program is ready to formally welcome Class 16 to start their journey. I want to encourage you to provide a few words for Class 16:

You’re all about to start a journey that can only be appreciated after walking through all the steps that lay before you. I want to encourage Class 16 to embrace the knowledge that LEAD NY will provide to you with an open mind and open arms. You will meet some amazing people. You will also meet some people that will challenge you. Learn from everyone, no matter how different your viewpoint may be. Choose to go into the dark woods for a walk – you never know what light you might find.
LEADNY: Tom, please tell us a little bit more about Farm Fresh First. What do you do, and can you describe your position there?

Facer: Farm Fresh First, LLC is an agricultural raw products supply company specializing in the supply of fruits, vegetables and popcorn for the processing industry. Farm Fresh First, LLC is owned by 17 fruit and vegetable growers and managers. We specialize in arranging production under contract with growers for specific customer needs. We work with growers in several states and supply processors in several states, however our New York volume is the highest. We have a small staff of experienced agricultural managers and they work very closely with our customers to meet their needs on a daily basis with the acreage that is produced specifically for the customer.

LEADNY: So FFF is relatively new – established in 2007 – we understand that several of the owners and employees of Farm Fresh First are LEADNY alumni. Four of the five founders of Farm Fresh First are LEADNY alumni, three of us were from Class I. LEADNY provided an opportunity for individuals of similar but different backgrounds to gain an understanding of the agricultural and food system as a group. Since everyone had a slightly different view of the food system, the group discussions (mostly after formal class hours) brought the group closer together. The success of the early LEADNY classes certainly encouraged others to apply and enroll in LEADNY. Agriculture is a large industry and an industry built on relationships. LEADNY has aided in building lasting relationships, and Farm Fresh First, LLC is just one example.

LEADNY: Recently, you were involved in the creation of the “Agricultural Research Fund”, specifically to benefit the processing vegetable industry in NYS. Were other LEADNY alumni involved in the creation of that endowment fund as well?

Facer: Actually the Agricultural Research Fund was not created by Farm Fresh First. The fund was created by a small group of western NY vegetable producers, all of which are LEADNY alumni. The Farm Fresh First Board of Directors strongly supported these individuals’ efforts and to add increased exposure and initiative established a program internally to contribute on an annual basis. We want the Fund to grow and encourage additional growers or industry personnel to contribute.

LEADNY: What do you see as some of the major future trends – positive, like consumer demand for local product, or negative, like new pest problems – that will be impacting the vegetable industry in NYS?

Facer: New York agriculture’s greatest asset is our close proximity to a large portion of the US population. The “local” movement has been a positive and appears to be more than just a fad. All of us in local agriculture are guilty of not keeping our “local” populations aware of where their food came from. So, we see on us for allowing our “local” populations to not be aware of what local agriculture has provided for generations. New insect and disease pests have and will always create challenges for the fruit and vegetable production system. Our New York climates require us to learn how to combat these challenges under our conditions and not depend on distant researchers to solve our problems. This is why we strongly support the “Agricultural Research Fund”.

LEADNY: On a more personal note, you are one of a growing number of alumni that have a child that has or will be participating in the LEADNY program. Editor’s note: Martha Facer, a career merchant at Wegmans Food Markets, was recently selected for class 16.) You were in class I, almost 30 years ago. Surely, a lot has changed in your life since then, but the experience remains a significant one for all those involved. Any advice for your daughter (and her classmates) on how to get the most out of this program?

Facer: I had the fantastic opportunity to be in LEADNY Class I. There were no prior class expectations or challenges when we started. Our first meeting was at a camp on Oswaco Lake. The first evening we had a formalized mixer to introduce ourselves, we had never been together prior to that evening. During the ‘formal’ exercise of telling about ourselves and learning something about the person that was sitting next to us, there was an ‘unofficial’ conversation between a few of us that we would meet in the parking lot after the session and go to the local bar. Class I did very well at ‘unofficial’ conversations, well over half of the class was in the parking lot that first evening! We did not have a hospitality room until the January session of our first year, but trust me, there was never a seminar after that without a hospitality room! In all seriousness, the most important aspect of the LEADNY experience is for class members to share each other’s learnings and understanding of the food system and how their personal interests and experiences relate. These discussions do not only happen in a class room setting, take full advantage of the entire time you are together!

LEADNY: Anything else you want to add?

Facer: The leadership of the NYS Agriculture Society and CALS at Cornell that formulated the foundation of LEADNY over 30 years ago must be complimented!
YES, I recognize the tremendous value of the LEAD New York program and wish to support it with a gift.

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