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Texas-sized Leadership

by June Berry

It should have not have been a surprise; perhaps it began as a joke about growing old together; but a group of active Texas Library Association members realized that they were seeing too many gray hairs and too many wrinkles. The quandary of developing new leaders and the seriousness of the problem prompted decided action. The answer was the TALL Texans Leadership Development Institute. The planning for the Institute began in 1991 with the work of an Ad Hoc Committee and the first Institute session occurred in July 1994 – a rapid response involving determined planning and real commitment on the part of TLA.

The process was broken into several areas of preparation: curriculum, fund raising, evaluation, selection of participants and mentors, publicity, and local arrangements. The Ad Hoc committee enlisted many additional members to work with approximately two dozen persons actively participating in the process. As a pledge of commitment, TLA agreed to fund the institute from the operating budget of the association if necessary. The participants are charged a small stipend but many employing institutions and TLA units pick up this stipend and the traveling expenses of the participants. Corporate sponsorship has been provided by Southwestern Bell Telephone and Hotho & Company for several years.

The TLA TALL Texans Leadership Development Institute's goals are to foster leadership in the association and in the workplace and to foster cultural diversity in library leadership in Texas. It is designed for mid-career library and information science practitioners (degreed and non-degreed) who are ready for a renewal experience and ready to assume new leadership responsibilities. During the five-day institute, the twenty-four participants and six mentors engage in activities centered around established curriculum elements such as change agent behavior, communication styles, conflict management, styles of leadership, mentoring and management, self-awareness of strengths, personal planning, developing a shared vision of the organization, understanding group dynamics, team building, and workplace values. The development of the Institute drew heavily from successful leadership institutes in Michigan, New Jersey, Utah and from leadership sessions sponsored by civic and government agencies within the state.

For all eight years the institute has been held at Harambe Oaks Ranch, a conference center located in the Texas Hill Country. The isolated setting is ideal for participants to forge networks and to form close relationships. No telephone, no television, and a relaxing setting make a fine environment for TALL Texans. Maureen Sullivan and Jack Siggins have been the facilitators for seven of the eight years. Their library experience enables

them to serve also as mentors along with six TLA mentors who have been selected based on their recognized service to Texas libraries and TLA.

Have these participants become the anticipated leaders? The answer is “yes” according to the new flush of elected and appointed officers in TLA. This year, four of the ten members of the TLA Executive Board have participated in the TALL Texans Leadership Development Institute; four have served as mentors. Eleven of the 26 standing and ad hoc TLA committees are chaired by TALL Texans; two of the four divisions of TLA divisions are chaired by TALL Texans; eight of the twenty-five round table/interest group chairs and two of the ten district chairs are TALL Texans. A group of the 2001 TALL Texans are preparing a survey of participants concerning work place leadership.

To date, 192 persons have participated in the TLA TALL Texans Leadership Institute. In June 2002 another 24 persons will be added to this number. Through this Institute, TLA is assuring its future and also a strong future for Texas libraries.

For more information contact [June Berry](#).

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