

# Esther Newman's hand helped mold county's leaders

There was a gathering this week to recognize Esther Newman for her many years of community service, including 18 years as executive director of Leadership Montgomery.

Esther was there when LM was founded at a time when institutions, corporations and communities were weighing the importance of leadership.

She has seen the graduation of 1,100 people from the program as she has dutifully carried out the LM mission: To bring together current and emerging leaders to make Montgomery County a better place to live and

work by building a diverse group of informed community trustees who can create collaborations and partnerships to further common goals.

That's a mouthful. Like most mission statements, it is more hopeful than achievable. But, it articulates a sense of direction, which is what leadership is about, and Esther has certainly done her part to shape LM as a positive force in our community.

When her two children went off to school, Esther went off to school. She earned an associate of arts degree from Montgomery College, a bachelor's of arts from Antioch University, and a master's of science from John Hopkins University.

She became director of The Family Life Center of Montgomery County, a public rela-

tions consultant for Montgomery General Hospital, program director for the YWCA of Montgomery County, and executive director of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce before joining Leadership Montgomery.

She has been involved in fighting breast cancer, a backer of her alma mater, Montgomery College, a founding board member for Leadership Maryland, and a supporter of a host of non-profit causes.

When the weather is summery and her schedule allows, she and her husband head for their boat and hang out on the Chesapeake Bay.

One of the tasks Leadership Montgomery has avoided is trying to be a leadership training site. People who join LM are thought to have demonstrated some measure of leadership ability or who seem to have potential for such a role.

Defining and developing leadership is a process filled with nuances. The organizational development literature of today argues that management, not leadership, is what matters most. That would have been heresy just years ago.

I am inclined to think that organizations are benefited mostly by good management and talented people on the front lines and they are twice blessed if the people who "run the place" know something about humility and integrity and making a real connection to the people around them. What part of that is leadership is where nuances take over.

Consultant Brent Filson uses an event in the life of George Washington to identify one nuance of leadership.

Even though the Revolutionary War ended with victory at Yorktown, a year and a half later Washington met his generals at a log hut in 1783. Filson writes:

"Popular misconception has the Revolutionary War ending at that battle (Yorktown). However, in reality, the war continued to drag on; and as it did, the Continental Army became increasingly rebellious. Most of the troops hadn't been paid in at least two years. Their promised pensions were not forthcoming. Popular sentiment in the army was gathering to overthrow the Continental Congress and install a military government.

"On the Ides of March in 1783, dozens of officers, representing every company in the army, met in a log hut to vote on taking this action when George Washington suddenly and unexpectedly walked in. He gave a speech denouncing the rebellious course they were on. But it wasn't the speech that carried the day ... Witnesses report that Washington's speech left many officers unconvinced, and when he was finished, there was much angry muttering among them. To bolster his case, the general pulled out a letter he recently received from a member of the Continental Congress. As he began reading, his usual confident air gave way to hesitancy.

"Then, unexpectedly, he drew out a spectacle case from his pocket. Few officers had ever seen him put on spectacles. Usually a severely formal man, he said in a voice softened with apology: 'Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but

almost blind in the service of my country.'

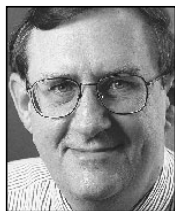
"The deep, human, emotional power of that moment can hardly be described. It electrified the officers. Here was their commander who had never taken a furlough during his eight years of command, who had faced storms of musketry fire, who through his daring and intelligence had kept the army intact in what most of the world thought was a lost cause; here was George Washington modestly asking his officers to bear with him in an all-too-human failing. It was an astonishing turning point.

"After Washington left the hut, the officers unanimously voted to 'continue to have unshakable confidence in the justice of the Congress and their country ...' The result was that the Continental Army disbanded without incident after the war formally ended a few months later and thereby set in motion the peaceful events that led to the creation of the Constitution."

Washington managed the Revolutionary War to a successful outcome. Some of that was good strategy; some of that was luck. He blended those skills with humility and integrity and he connected with his officers and his men around a worthy cause that made him a model of leadership.

To the degree that leadership programs and folks like Esther Newman bring forth leaders who connect with the worthy causes of today, our communities are the better for it.

*Chuck Lyons is chief executive officer of The Gazette.*



**Commentary**  
**CHUCK LYONS**