

Senior Leadership Montgomery

By Esmail Tabibi and John G. Miers (SLM '10)



Front row, left to right: William E. Bennett, Gary D. Thorud, Jane Ford Salzano, Aileen Klein, MaeWanda L. Michael-Jackson, Janis F. Froehlich, LaVonne J. Thorud, Oliver W. Lancaster, Elsa L. Giles; middle row: S. Esmail Tabibi, Jane Hughes, Melanie R. Polk, Joan A. Schaffer, Linda K. Vann, Judith A. Fink, Herbert S. Snyder, Ella V. Redfield; top row: John G. Miers, James Onder, Erich Baumgartner, Girma Haile Giorgis, Terry Vann, Mark David Rother; not pictured: Lee J. Burstyn.

Who could have known how fabulous the experience would be when we applied and were accepted to be part of the 2010 Senior Leadership Montgomery (SLM) class? Our first meeting began with a round of "speed dating", a quick opportunity to meet and learn about each of the individuals making up our group. Each time we exchanged partners, it became increasingly obvious that we were in for an interesting year. The group was full of accomplished, talented people with widely varying backgrounds.

As recognized by **Judy Fink**, "We the SLM class of 2010 are a tapestry....a wonderful weaving of individual strands...the unique strands are varied in colors, in textures...and all come together in a magical way." Our group of 24 County residents hails from many states and countries. We include businesspeople and nonprofit leaders, doctors, nurses, pastors and policy analysts. And we are diverse in terms of age (55 to well over 80), race, religion and (dis)ability.

Leadership Montgomery (LM) is a community leadership program that has been in

existence for two decades. Traditionally, it is a program to help up-and-coming civically engaged leaders in Montgomery County learn more about the County and to foster networking among these citizens. A few years back, some of our community leaders realized the opportunity to enlist the leadership talent of our retired, or soon to be retiring, citizens in a similar fashion, and Senior Leadership Montgomery was born. Clearly, our class has benefited greatly from this effort.

During our program, we traveled from Boyds to Silver Spring, from Glen Echo to Rockville, and all the way to Germantown. We saw many aspects of life in the County, often for the first time. For example, we learned about its history and governance, public safety and traffic challenges, about the growing diverse population, and about our lively arts community and our wonderful arts facilities, and we learned about efforts to make our environment "greener". **John Miers** pointed out, "We had homework, too: ride-alongs with police and fire/rescue personnel, and a trip in the County's traffic plane."

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Each of our seven meetings was held at sites relevant to the day's topic. We were consistently amazed by how effectively our facilitators created a comprehensive microcosm of the County in which we could be immersed.

Importantly, we worked on an extended project to help the County's Department of Health and Human Services, Impact Silver Spring and some of the County's most established social services organizations with the innovative Neighbors Campaign. This effort is bringing essential safety-net services to Montgomery County's neediest neighborhoods, while working with local citizens to teach them how to help one another. As **Joan Schaffer** said, "During the course of our project, we went through the usual process of 'storming, forming, norming and performing', and emerged as a fully bonded, strong and effective team." **Judy Fink** continued her tapestry analogy by pointing out that, "One could not have imagined in September what this element of our tapestry would look like and how useful it will be in support of this project."

These experiences helped us to gain perspective: on the vastness of the County's landscape, its various services and resources, and its diversity, as well as the goals and visions of the County government and individual leaders have about how they can better serve the interests of its citizens. The experience also afforded us the opportunity to gain insight into the challenges and issues that face the County when we met some of the County's top leaders.

This enriching experience resulted not only in better understanding, more empathy, and a greater sense of community, but also made us realize that we can find so many ways to utilize our individual talents and leadership skills in serving the community in which we live.

Each of us brought gifts, talent, experiences and dreams, and Leadership Montgomery's **Esther Newman** and **Kati Gimes** provided the challenge to enable each of us to grow, and to discover how we can add to the richness of our County. Each of us is honored to have been part of creating this year's unique tapestry.

Would we do it again? Would we recommend the program to others? Absolutely, without hesitation!