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Three take part in Diversity Initiative

ARTICLE | FEBRUARY 19, 2013 | BY KONSTANTIN VENGEROWSKY



Three Clarendon County residents have become a part of The Riley Institute Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI). Bea Rivers, Dwight Stewart and Billy Richardson are in the five-month program that

will be held once a month in Columbia.

The program is focused on embracing diversity and using people's differences to create circumstances to bring all South Carolinians into the social and economic mainstream of the state. The goal is to bring various leaders from the state together to build leadership skills while also examining solutions to the challenges of their communities and state.

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The Riley Institute started the program in 2003, in partnership with the American Institute for Managing Diversity (AIMD). The program encourages community leaders to consider the challenges and opportunities presented by the many facets of diversity in the state, including among others, differences in cultural background, language, gender and physical ability.

Since its inception, the program has included more than 1,000 graduate members including CEOs of corporations, mayors, council members, legislators, superintendents, religious leaders, non-profit heads, Chamber of Commerce directors and community leaders.

The program started with an orientation session on Feb. 6, which will be followed by four full-day workshops spread over a four-month period. Workshops will include classroom discussions, case studies, short lectures, scenario analyses and other learning tools. Between workshop days, participants will be encouraged to meet in sub-groups to complete assignments and develop a community action project. The program ends with each group's presentation of their community action project to the class.

Rivers, a local community advocate who's involved in many organizations within the county, said that her goal for the course is to get a better understanding of how different people define diversity.

"This class is a good building block of bringing people together from across the spectrum in South Carolina," Rivers said. "I hope to contribute my knowledge and also to be able to gain from the experiences of others."

Stewart, who has served as Clarendon County Chairman for the past 12 years, said that his goal is to gain from the discussions to serve the citizens of Clarendon County better.

“I’m looking forward to gaining personal growth from the diverse number of leaders in this program and to better understand some of the issues that still exist across the state,” Stewart said.

Clarendon County Councilman Billy Richardson, who has served the county for 18 years, said that he was really surprised with some of the things that he picked up on from other leaders from across the state involved in the course.

“It really amazed me to find out that some of the areas in our state are still struggling with racial and other issues,” Richardson said. “It makes you appreciate what we have in Clarendon County.”

Richardson said that his goal is to gain from the program and to help bring about discussions that will help to mend those issues in other parts of the state.

For more information on The Riley Institute Diversity Leaders Initiative, visit <http://riley.furman.edu/diversity>.



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