



From left: Calder Ehrmann, Senior Associate with the Diversity Leadership Academy; Leah Garrett, Kimberly Cooley and Liz Seman, JLG attendees; Juan Johnson, President of the DLA

Diversity Leadership Academy

WRITTEN BY KIMBERLY COOLEY



My participation in the Diversity Leadership Academy was one of the best experiences I have had. Not only was the coursework meaningful but I was immediately able to apply what I learned. It's helped me become a better manager - not only with my paid staff, but the lessons are applicable to managing volunteers as well. I had the opportunity to meet and work with extremely bright and talented people who are truly dedicated to advancing diversity management in our community.

—Liz Seman,
Community Vice President

The Upstate South Carolina Diversity Leadership Academy (DLA) is a community-based leadership development program committed to providing business, civic, and community leaders with effective diversity management leadership skills. This program is sponsored by the Richard W. Riley Institute at Furman University and in cooperation with the American Institute of Managing Diversity, a non-profit diversity think tank. The program consists of five full day sessions, scheduled once a month, and participants are assigned to small groups or learning circles. Each session includes lectures, case studies, and role playing. A capstone presentation by each learning circle is presented during the final session.

In January 2006, Kimberly Cooley, JLG President, participated in the Diversity Leadership Academy IV representing the Junior League of Greenville. Fellow Junior League members,

Liz Seman, JLG Community – V.P. and JLG sustainer, Leah Garrett were also participants in this class. Having three members from the Junior League in attendance was a wonderful opportunity to learn and bring new skills back to our organization.

Prior to attending the Diversity Leadership Academy, participants perception of diversity consisted of physical attributes such as race, gender, ethnicity, etc., which is considered representation. After the first session, we learned that diversity is any collective mixture characterized by similarities and differences. A natural accompaniment of diversity is diversity tension. By learning how to work through the Strategic Diversity Management Problem-Solving Framework, the participants are able to provide an analysis of the situation, draw a conclusion, and make the appropriate recommendation for the problem.

Participants in the Diversity Leadership Academy work together with fellow business and community leaders providing a networking opportunity to encourage positive change in our community. The leadership skills acquired allow participants to make informed diversity decisions within their organizations.

The Junior League of Greenville does not recruit potential members on the basis of physical characteristics, but on what the individual brings to our organization. We are looking for women who are interesting in learning about our community and serving it through voluntarism. Our mission stands firm and the women who make up our organization provide a wonderful mixture of ideas, experiences, and backgrounds. These differences are what make the Junior League of Greenville a driving force in our community. ■