



Courtesy photo

Graduates from the Knox-Haskell Texas Rural Leadership Program are shown with Lorrie Coplen and Jimi Coop, who started the program. Shown in the top row: Jamie Ferguson, Sheri Warren, Nicole Buchanan, Christina Isbell, Nicki Ivie, Jamie Jordan, Coop and Jimi. In the bottom row: Bea Hernandez, Bianca Harrimon and Susan Jarred. Not pictured are Veronica Anderson, Jessica Boggs and Lisa Tidwell.

12 graduate from leadership program

CHESTER—A second year of the Knox-Haskell Counties Texas Rural Leadership Program (TRLP) is in the books as 12 participants from the two counties graduated from the eight-month program on Monday at the Webfoot Lodge. They were joined by their employers, family and county government officials and community members.

The graduation celebration was a fun-filled evening. Live music was provided by Parrish Coplen, who was a graduate of last year's

program. Roger Rowe and his staff at Webfoot Connections Lodge prepared and served a steak and chicken dinner to the group.

Nicki Harle of Baird, the former executive director and founder of Texas Midwest Community Network who currently runs a leadership program for Bastrop County, was the speaker. Participants answered her questions about impactful and memorable moments throughout the past eight months. She left the group with some final notes on not letting

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KCVG board member, sent one of her employees Bea Hernandez through the program. "It is encouraging to see how these ladies have developed into confident leaders for our respective towns and counties through this program," she said.

Each county will put their new-found skills and experience into practice through the fulfillment of a community project. These projects are collaborations among the participants. The Knox County participants are planning to host a Youth Engagement Symposium in the fall of 2016. The goal of the symposium is to bring communities and volunteers together at a day-long event and provide them with information and resources they need to focus on and address youth issues identified in the county.

Hopefully, each community will leave empowered to develop youth centers that provide kids a safe place to come to study, learn and socialize after school. The Haskell County group is working on a digital sign that will be placed on the courthouse square. The sign will be used to display messages that pertain to the citizens of Haskell, events and emergency messages. The group is gathering quotes from several different companies and working on the details for the public to get their messages displayed.

"In the past two years, we have seen the incredible impact this program has had on the young people in our communities," said city councilwoman Jill Druessedow. The TRLP participants have already been stepping up and organizing amazing projects like the park clean ups, fundraisers and a mural.

The TRLP program began last year as a joint effort between the Knox County Visioning Group (KCVG) and the Development Corporation of Haskell (DCOH). These two groups saw the need for leadership in their communities and decided

to do something about it.

Once a month for eight months, the group met and worked through a leadership curriculum provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Powerful speakers from around the region are brought in to teach the curriculum, lending their experience to the group and helping the participants establish valuable networks. The afternoons are filled with tours and speakers from around Knox and Haskell Counties. Participants explore city and county government, healthcare, education, economic development, quality of life and more. The tours help participants explore their local resources and learn more about their communities as a whole. A highlight of the program is a trip to Austin where they have the opportunity to tour the capitol and visit with key leaders, organizations and state agencies about a wide variety of state-wide resources available to rural communities.

Haskell County Judge David Davis said he believes in the leadership program. "I went through a similar program in the mid 90s, and I believe they are very worthwhile," he said. "It is important for people to understand their commitment when they enter into such a program. Judge Davis is currently working with the Haskell graduates on their digital sign project. This year's TRLP graduates include Christina Isbell, Jamie Ferguson, Nichole Buchanan, Jamie Jordan, Veronica Anderson, Jessica Boggs and Susan Jarred from Haskell County and Nicki Ivie, Sheri Warren, Lisa Tidwell, Bianca Harrimon and Beatrice Hernandez from Knox County.

The program was directed by Jimi Coplen and Lorrie Coop.

fear, fault or feelings get in the way of accomplishing big things in the community.

Nancy Birkenfeld, the county executive director of the USDA Farm Service Agency in Knox County who also serves as the