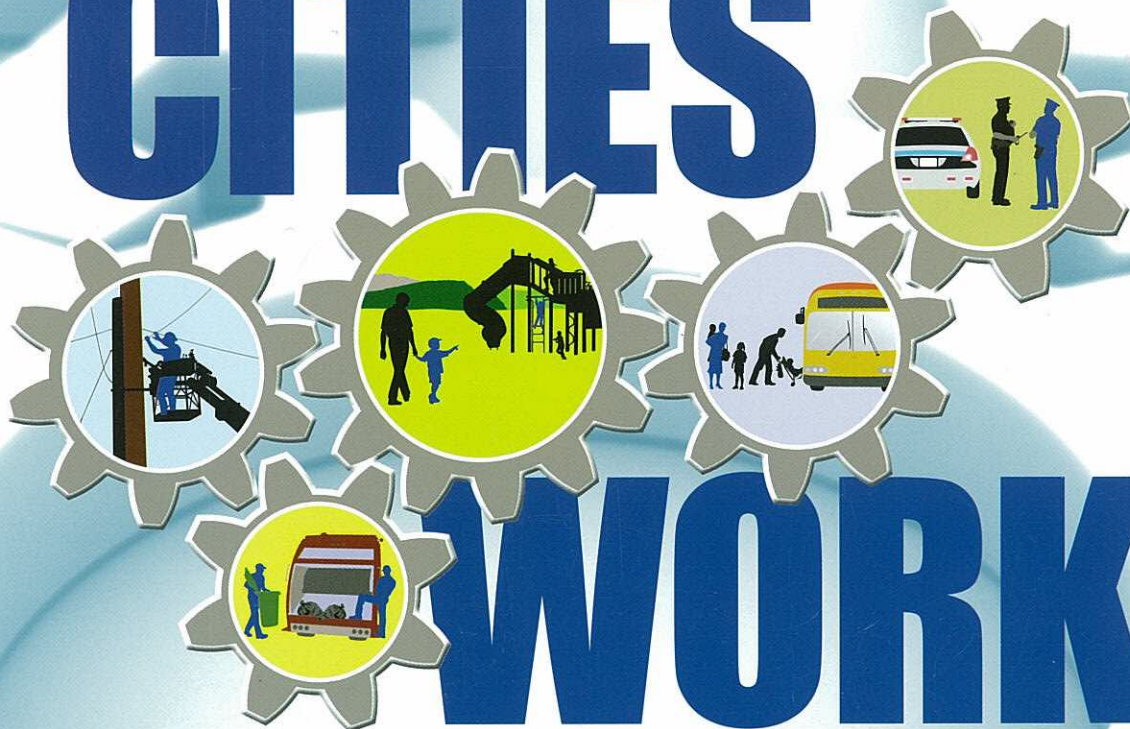


Quality Cities



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Educate Your Residents During Florida City Government Week

October 16-22, 2011

by Sharon G. Berrian
Florida League of Cities

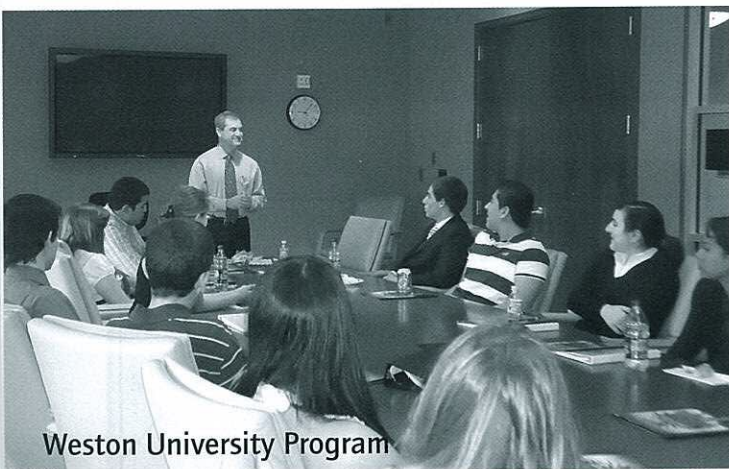
A report released in 2008 contained a sobering finding for our state: Florida was ranked 47th in the nation for overall “civic health.” The study, conducted by the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship and the National Conference on Citizenship, combined factors such as voter turnout, attendance at public meetings and volunteerism in obtaining its results.

Another civic health issue is evident in statewide statistics showing that just 30 percent of Floridians are natives, while 70 percent moved here from somewhere else. This can greatly affect a Floridian’s understanding of local government in the Sunshine State, as there aren’t always opportunities for new residents, especially adults, to quickly learn how their governments function.

To address these concerns, the Florida League of Cities established Florida City Government Week as part of an ongoing effort to educate the public on how city government works and the services that cities provide.

The League encourages every city, town and village in Florida to take an active role in promoting its municipal government through civic education. City officials play an important part in this effort. Everyone benefits from an informed public.

Cities provide a higher level of service than most governments, and yet many residents are unaware of how municipal services affect their daily lives. Through Florida City Government Week – scheduled for October 16-22 this year – the League seeks to heighten the public’s awareness of city government’s role in enhanc-



Weston University Program



Fernandina Beach



League President Joy Cooper, flanked by students from three Tallahassee area schools, received the Florida City Government Week resolution in September 2010 from then-Gov. Charlie Crist and the Florida Cabinet.

ing the quality of life in communities. For wider impact, Florida's cities might consider involving their local schools, businesses, news media and civic clubs in planning activities for the week.

Here are a few low-cost ways to celebrate Florida City Government Week, some of which can be ongoing programs:

- Set up exhibits at local shopping malls or other public places with information on your city government.
- Offer tours of city hall and other city facilities.
- Sponsor a heritage day focusing on the history of the city and its government. This could be coordinated with a local historical society.
- Create a speakers bureau and enlist the services of elected and appointed officials who can speak at senior centers, civic groups and area schools.
- Coordinate a program with schools to stage a special event during the week, such as a student "mock" city council meeting or a "shadowing" event involving city officials and staff.
- Encourage area schools to integrate city government into the school curriculum. The following two booklets published by the League might be helpful: "My City: I'm Part of It, I'm Proud of It" contains lessons and activities about city government, while "The ABCs of City Government" is an educational supplement for elementary school teachers.
- Encourage a school city-government club or youth council to study community issues that involve municipal services and citizen participation.

While many Florida cities already have a youth council, the League's "A Guide for Creating a Youth Council" can serve as a road map for others wanting to start a similar program.

- Citizens' academies are an excellent way to educate residents, build positive relationships, and increase communication between city government officials and local residents. Several cities share information about their program in the League's "Guide for Creating a Citizens' Academy."

The League publications mentioned above are all available online at www.floridaleagueofcities.com/Publications.aspx?CNID=184. In addition, Florida

City Government Week planning packets will be sent to League members and to schools in August.

While all cities, towns and villages in the state are encouraged to celebrate Florida City Government Week, some choose to host their event during a different time of the year, in conjunction with another planned city holiday, festival or occasion. The goal is to increase local residents' understanding of their city government, no matter when it is taught.

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