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Elgin Area Leadership Academy hosts graduation ceremony

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Submitted by Pat Szpekowski



Eighteen members of the Elgin Area Leadership Academy completed their classes with a final graduation ceremony held at Elgin Community College on Saturday, May 7. Pictured are the Class of 2022 Elgin Area Leadership Academy graduates, along with Dan Fox, far right front, and Ruth Munson, far left front, co-facilitators of EALA. *Courtesy of Elgin Area Leadership Academy*

Eighteen members of the Elgin Area Leadership Academy completed their classes with a final graduation ceremony held at Elgin Community College on Saturday, May 7.

The graduation ceremony included a keynote address by Jennifer Rakow of IHC Construction Companies LLC in Elgin, who is an Elgin Community College District 509 trustee and an EALA graduate alum, class of 2011.

Graduates of this year's 2021-22 EALA program are: Sergio Anaya, Prairie Community Bank; Laura Bedolla, City of Elgin; Fabiana Bertoncello, Elgin State Bank; Lulu Blacksmith, Elgin Community College; Alex Brotsos, Gail Borden Public Library; Lejewel K. Crigler, community representative; Michelle Esquivel, Well Child Center; Mikala Larson, City of Elgin; Tina Link, Advocate Sherman Hospital; Jennifer May, Community Outreach Executive-Healthcare; Taylor Noble, Petrochoice; Nicholas Piekarski, Hampton, Lenzini and Renwick; Sara Rabe, Elgin School District U-46; Anthony Ramos, Elgin Community College; Susan Taylor-Demming, Elgin Community College; Maria Topete, Elgin State Bank; Lisa Utley, Elgin Community College; and Jordan Wildermuth, Nurse-Family Partnership.

Dan Fox and Ruth Munson, co-facilitators of EALA, congratulated the graduates on their commitment to the community and involvement in the program. "Your enthusiastic participation and contribution to the Academy are affirmations of your dedication and ability," said Fox. "We look forward to working with you as colleagues and seeing you emerge as the new leaders in the Elgin area."

A highlight of the EALA journey is the establishment of hands-on service projects by EALA class members. This year's projects include: Buddy Bag Initiative; High School Diploma Project; U-46 Change for Hunger; Zara; and Sustainability Initiative.

In speaking to the EALA graduates at the event, Munson noted, "The acquaintances you've made and the new friendships that have been cultivated will be your resources for the future. This is networking at its best. It truly has been a privilege and joy working with you. We look forward to all of our future associations."

Sponsored by the Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce, the award-winning EALA is a 10-month program, which includes once-a-month meetings on Saturday mornings, for individuals interested in building an understanding of community leadership through exposure, enrichment and engagement.

Monthly programs provide individuals with skills, knowledge, connections, and engagement necessary to develop and leverage a strong professional network of future and current leaders in all industry types.

Since its initial 1991-92 class, over 550 individuals have graduated from this unique EALA experience.

It has provided hands-on opportunities and interactions with the City of Elgin, local education and health care institutions, businesses, not for profits, and much more to develop and expand each individual's leadership qualities.

For more information, visit elginchamber.com/leadership.

