

Junior League of Arlington Honored for Excellence



The Junior League of Arlington received honors for its turnaround at the 92nd annual Conference of the Association of Junior Leagues International at St. Louis in May.

JLA is a women's organization that serves the community by volunteering and participating in annual events. It hosts the Back-to-School Fair for low-income AISD students and a Glass Slipper Boutique to make prom affordable for girls from surrounding high schools.

Two years ago, the Junior League of Arlington took a new approach called "Appreciate! Collaborate! Educate!" in response to its declining membership and a corresponding fundraising deficit.

"Appreciate! Collaborate! Educate!" is a three-part program. It sends out letters of appreciation to people involved with the organization, it gives members the opportunity to collaborate with each other and it educates members with skills to help them succeed in their personal life and within the organization.

The new program resulted in a 400% increase in new members and a national award.

"We really hadn't done a revamp of our new member program since the mid 80's. So, it was just something that needed to be updated," Jeannie Deakyne, JLA President, said.

Through extensive research, Deakyne found what needed the most attention was having a membership model that matched the lifestyles, time and skills of the women the organization wanted to attract.

"We surveyed the members to get their ideas on ways we could improve the member experience. We talked to women who we knew had been supporters of the organization, but for whatever reason couldn't join. We found out why they weren't able to join at the time," she said. "And then, we did a lot of research not just with other junior leagues but other volunteer organizations across the nation to find out what things they were doing successfully and what kinds of challenges they were having, too."

The old model required new members to complete a 10-month training before becoming an active member.

The new program introduced a "semester model", offered in August or January, where it takes new members four months to become an active member. "Appreciate! Collaborate! Educate!" also established an Emerging Leaders Institute to prepare 28 members with the skills needed to rapidly obtain leadership positions in the organization and in the community within four months. Due to the success of the institute, JLA plans on expanding the classes to the community in January.

"Members couldn't imagine the program being any other way, because it's really quick and they get to go out and do the things they joined the organization to do," Deakyne said. "Even I commented that it would

be really hard to know what I would be doing in a year from now. So, how could we expect a new member to be able to plan and schedule her life the same way.”

Increased volunteer recognition, a mentoring program and monthly get-togethers were also designed in the new program to allow members to effectively engage and connect with each other.

In the last year, there has been a 15% increase in membership with a total of 500 members, which is the reverse of the trend that other organizations are facing right now.

“We are finding that membership in other volunteer organizations is on a minor decrease, and we are experiencing a 15 percent increase,” Deakyne said.

Other junior leagues have asked how JLA was able to go through the process of evaluating, communicating and implementing its program.

“I think other types of organizations are also going to look to a model like this to educate their new volunteers quickly, and get them serving in their community quickly as well,” she said.

The Junior League of Arlington’s goal for the future is to maintain its current success and to continue growing its membership. JLA is always looking for new members who are interested in benefiting the community, committed to developing new skills and dedicated to volunteering. Find out more about JLA at <http://www.jlarlington.org/>.

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