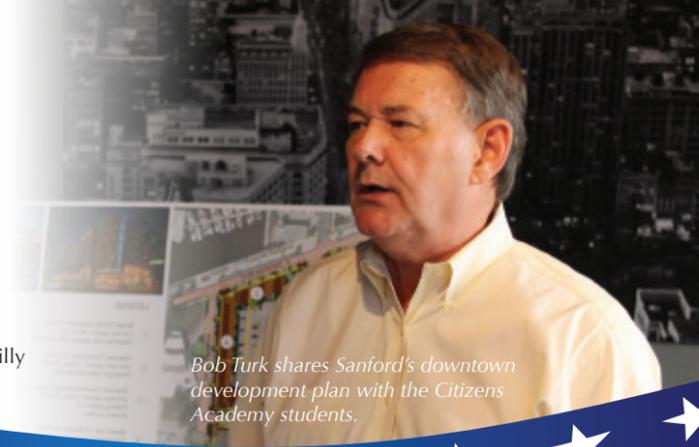


FIRST-CLASS CITIZENS

by Peter Reilly



Bob Turk shares Sanford's downtown development plan with the Citizens Academy students.

Citizens Academy gives residents an inside look at Sanford government

Jennifer Smith knows which businesses are taking off at the Orlando Sanford International Airport, what the new wave along the waterfront will be, and why excitement is building over downtown construction. Did she become privy to this information because she is a high-ranking official or government insider? If you answered "no," go to the head of the class.

Jennifer, an employee at AAA in Lake Mary, simply enrolled in Citizens Academy, a free 10-week course about everything the Sanford government does in service to its residents.

"I have been a Sanford citizen since 1989, and I wanted to find

out what makes the city tick," says Jennifer. "I'm just interested in how things work."

The college of government knowledge meets every Wednesday from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Class size and interest have grown since the inaugural program was offered two years ago. The most recent series included classes on everything from "City Government and Economics" to "Recreation and Utilities."

"The Police Department and Fire Department tours were really cool," says Jennifer. "I really enjoyed them."

Lake Mary Life tagged along for a recent Citizens Academy field trip: a bus tour of Sanford that was led by Bob Turk, the city's economic development director. The trip provided an overview of both proposed and approved development in Sanford.

The bus picked up the 30 eager students at the marina in downtown Sanford. From there, the pilgrims of progress journeyed along the shore of Lake Monroe. Bob, with microphone in hand, provided a guided tour of Sanford's future. The vision of Sanford's waterfront includes detached single-family homes, attached townhouses, apartments over first-floor retail stores, a hotel, and two parking structures.

From the waterfront, the bus traveled along Sanford Avenue to Orlando Sanford International Airport. Bob talked about bringing industry and jobs to the outlying properties at the airport, and he also discussed efforts to make the airport's service area a destination and not just a secondary gateway to Orlando and the theme parks.

After our visit to the airport, the bus cruised to Rinehart Road. Bob revealed that another car dealership is coming, and a fifth restaurant is joining the four that are already bustling in that area. He also disclosed that the partially developed shopping plaza south of State Road 46A will be knocked down, and a new complex for Florida Hospital will be erected in its place. Once we circled the city, the bus returned to the Sanford waterfront.

Everyone enjoyed the tour, although each person had slightly different reasons for participating.

"I think it's important to have a little bit of knowledge about the city and what it offers."

— Amber Clore, owner of an interior design business

Clara Black and Shelly Fitzpatrick recently retired to Sanford and are determined to be part of their adopted home. "We joined the Citizens Academy because we are new to the area, and we needed to learn more about Sanford," says Clara.

Shelly adds: "I didn't know much about Sanford before I got here. Now that I am here, I wanted to be a part of it. I don't just want to live down the street, I want to be part of the community. This was the best way to learn about it."

By the time you read this, the Citizens Academy will have ended for the school year. But don't worry, it will start back up again in September. The city will hand out applications for the fall classes beginning in July. Admission is on a first-come, first-served basis, and participation is limited to 30 people 18 or older. To graduate and receive a certificate of completion, members must attend at least 7 of the 10 classes. Graduation will be held at a city commission meeting.

Why does Sanford spend the time and money to educate citizens about government?

Because it pays off.

"The Citizens Academy is the perfect environment to educate the public on the services and programs the city offers," says Lisa Mosca, Sanford's communications officer. "Informed citizens who graduate from the Academy become advocates for Sanford. They become volunteers, serve on task forces, and can serve on city boards. They already care about Sanford when they start the classes, and by the time they are finished, they love Sanford even more."



Jennifer Smith enjoys learning about Sanford.

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