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Former professor, program director has profound effect on community

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NEWARK -- When Robert Klingensmith started as a professor of geography on the Newark campus of Ohio State University 37 years ago, little did anyone know the far-reaching effects he would have on the community.

Like a pebble in a lake causing a ripple effect, Klingensmith quietly has affected life in Licking County while many people don't even know who he is.

Klingensmith, of Newark, retired from the Newark campus in 2006 and at the same time retired after 18 years as executive director of the Community Leadership Program. During that time, Klingensmith recruited more than 400 people for the leadership training program.

There are 42 community based leadership programs in Ohio and in Licking County. The monthly sessions present panel discussion, field trips, lectures and hands-on workshops to explore the issues, challenges and opportunities facing the area. After completion of the program, many of the graduates serve on social service agencies boards and community action groups.

"The graduates (of the Community Leadership Program) have done a number of things that are positive in building a better community," Klingensmith said.

Some of the people who have taken the Community Leadership Program include Bonnie Coe, of Central Ohio Technical College, Warren Weber, of the Licking County Planning Commission, Rindy Brooks, of Heartbeats of Licking County, Rick Platt, of the Port Authority, Jeremy Blake, formerly of the Newark City School Board, and Doug Sassen, of the Licking County Juvenile Court.

Other past notable participants include Donna Carpenter, executive director of the United Way, Cheryl Snyder, of Park National Bank, Rob O'Neill, of the Southgate Corp., Yvonne Bell, of COTC, Rod Cook, of the Licking County Red Cross, Marcia Downes, of The Works, Dawn Pettit-West, of The Boeing Co. and Judge Robert Hoover.

Fred Paul took over as executive director of the program when Klingensmith retired in 2006. Paul still calls his mentor when questions come up.

"When you look back on the names of the people that have taken the program, these people populate a lot of the boards throughout the county," Paul said. "These boards have had major influences on economic development and what goes on in Licking County. ... If it was not for Bob and his type of energy, the whole quality of life in Licking County would suffer."

Klingensmith also was involved in the organization and development of Leadership Ohio, a state-wide program based on the Community Leadership model. He was a co-founder, board member and served as the first executive director for the program for two years.

Being involved with these two programs also opened a lot of doors for Klingensmith, who was able to meet people like former Gov. Bob Taft and his wife, Hope, and current Gov. Ted Stickland.

"I met all sorts of people that I would never meet as just a professor here at the Newark campus," he said.

His other activities in the community include his association with Leadership Tomorrow, the Licking County Planning Commission, United Way and the Licking County Overall Economic Development Committee, to name just a few. He also has been a deacon at First Presbyterian Church of Granville since 1976.

Although retired, Klingensmith still teaches geography to more than 140 students during two quarters per year at the Newark campus. He still is active on two boards, the Woodlands and the Port Authority, of which he has been a member since its inception.

"I am pretty proud of the Port Authority," Klingensmith said. "We kept several hundred jobs here in Licking County with the reorganization of the Newark Air Force Base. I am really proud I had a small role in keeping the base open."

Rick Platt is the current executive director of the Port Authority and has known Klingensmith for several years.

"Bob is one of those folks who is an unsung hero," Platt said. "The general public hasn't seen him much, but his tentacles reach very far. When I think of the things he's done, he recommends a generations of leaders to serve on boards throughout the county."
