

## Billings Area Chamber of Commerce Youth Leadership Billings Program

The Billings Area Chamber of Commerce's Youth Leadership Billings program is a community-wide leadership program for forty (40) high school juniors designed to expose young leaders to the various elements that interact to form a strong and dynamic local community and economy. Each fall an informational brochure inviting students to apply for the program is mailed to every junior attending high school in Billings, Shepherd and Laurel. To be considered for the program, students must submit a written application and participate in a face-to-face interview with two volunteer business professionals. Each year the students selected equally represent Billings' four high schools with eight (8) students each from Central, Senior, Skyview and West and four (4) each from Shepherd and Laurel. They are chosen on the basis of their responses in the written application and personal interview. Although academic performance is necessary to get pre-approval from either their counselor or principal for participation in the program, grades are not used as criteria for selection.

### **Objectives**

Youth Leadership Billings' goal is to achieve the following objectives in its program: (1) identify student leaders who are concerned about their community; (2) select a class of students who represent various backgrounds; (3) provide opportunities for students from different areas to get to know one another; (4) present action-oriented, in-depth programs to acquaint students with community issues, needs, and resources; and (5) allow interaction with community leaders and decision makers.

### **Programming**

Youth Leadership Billings participants meet six days a year to learn about issues affecting our community. Each program year starts with a retreat that includes "get acquainted" and group problem solving activities. Each monthly meeting day integrates various topics such as culture, history, tourism, economics, social services, government and judicial systems, and healthcare into "themes" which provide a cohesive learning framework. Keynote speakers, panel discussions, experiential exercises, and site visits give participants an intense look at the inner workings of the Billings community.

A community work day involves the youth spending a day in addition to the regular program days. This day is spent with the adult participants volunteering their labor at various agencies in Billings that have needs but who don't have the work force or funds available to get these projects done. In addition, the youth and adult leadership classes share a minimum of two program days to create greater interaction and mentoring opportunities between the youth and adults.

Youth Leadership Billings provides an opportunity for participants to gain valuable knowledge about the community and challenges them to greater involvement by introducing them to volunteer opportunities within the community. For example, one class committed to trying to establish a Teen Court and another to attempting to establish a Teen Center.

Youth Leadership Billings is a spin-off of the Chamber's parent program, Leadership Billings. The only professional development opportunity of its kind in Billings, Leadership Billings' adult program is comprised of professionals employed in businesses and organizations such as banks, law firms, financial service providers, human resource firms, hotels, accounting firms, county government, insurance agencies, healthcare facilities, and not-for-profit corporations.

### **Success**

We measure the success of the Youth Leadership Billings program by the number of young people that become leaders in their high schools, colleges and communities. Youth Leadership Billings is beginning its 19<sup>th</sup> year. Over 500 of our area's young leaders have graduated from this program. We also measure success by the number of high school students that express interest by applying for this program annually.

### **Funding**

Youth Leadership Billings is funded from two sources: (1) student tuition and (2) financial contributions from corporations and organizations.

#### *Student Tuition*

Tuition for the Youth Leadership Billings program is \$50.00 per student. Scholarships are available if any student is unable to pay the tuition due to financial hardship.

### **Application Process**

Applications are mailed to all high school juniors from the participating schools in early September. Completed applications are returned to the Billings Chamber of Commerce. High school counselors assist with coordinating 15 minute interviews with adults from the business community who have completed the Leadership Billings program. The interviewers make final recommendations for the participants for the program.

**Questions?** Contact Linda Gleason at the Billings Chamber of Commerce, 869-3722.