

CIVIC EDUCATION

Open Houses, Career Days, Mock Council Meetings and More

Florida city officials teach the importance of municipal government



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Florida City Government Week was launched by the Florida League of Cities in 1991. It is part of an ongoing effort to raise public awareness about how city government works and the services that cities provide.

In 2013, Florida City Government Week was held October 20-26. Cities throughout the state participated in this annual event, which was proclaimed by the governor. A summary of those civic education activities follows.



BELLE GLADE

The City of Belle Glade presented Certificates of Excellence to local elementary, middle and high school students who earned Level 5 on school FCAT tests. The city's elected officials and staff, school superintendent, education committee, principals and staff from the schools, and parents were present at the awards ceremony. In addition, each city staff member received a "My City: I'm Part of It, I'm Proud of It" button and bumper sticker, and the week was advertised on the city's marquee and banners posted at City Hall.

CAPE CANAVERAL

The City of Cape Canaveral issued a Florida City Government Week proclamation. In addition, the city again partnered with Cape View Elementary School for the week. Each grade (k - 6) traveled to various locations throughout the city to learn how their city government works. Events included a tour/demonstration at the public works department and a mock code enforcement board meeting. The city received thank you notes from the students that were posted on the city's website.



DESTIN

The City of Destin hosted its annual open house on October 23. Nearly 300 people attended the event, which showcased all city departments. City staff met with residents and educated them on the day-to-day operations of the city, as well as on large and small projects. The mayor and council honored city volunteers by presenting them with the new Destin Coin, a symbol of pride and responsibility. A free community shred day was also held during the event.



FORT PIERCE

The City of Fort Pierce hosted an open house, during which the public could visit each department to ask questions and receive information about the various services the city provides. Fort Pierce also offered tours of City Hall to local schools. The two events provided a great learning experience for residents.

FORT WALTON BEACH

The City of Fort Walton Beach adopted a Florida City Government Week proclamation. The city also participated in a municipal shadow program and held a luncheon to honor its employees. Elected officials and the senior leadership team greeted employees as they entered the facility and then served lunch to them. A photo montage of individual employees at work throughout the year was displayed at the luncheon, and the "Manager of the Year" and "Employees of the Year" were recognized.



FREEPORT

The mayor, council members and city planner participated in a career day at the local elementary school so that students could learn more about their city government. The feedback from students was excellent – they wrote thank you notes and some even stated they would like to become involved with city politics. The City of Freeport also established The Heritage Center of Freeport, a museum that houses city artifacts and a library of historical facts dating back to the 1800s.



GAINESVILLE

Each year, a special field trip is offered to the fifth grade "Citizens of the Month" in Alachua County public schools. Approximately 25 students (and a parent chaperone) tour various city facilities, including City Hall, a recreation center, a fire station and the police station. The day ends with the students being recorded for a government channel public-service announcement and meeting with a city commissioner. In addition, the city adopted a Florida City Government Week resolution. This year's events mark the eighth year that the school board has partnered with the city to offer this educational opportunity.



GREENACRES

The City of Greenacres hosted job-shadowing opportunities for high school students. Two of the students were even able to sit in during an employee’s probationary evaluation review. City Hall and facility tours were offered and staff included a cultural awareness/ethnic education day to provide information about the city’s demographics, foods and customs. Information was shared with an afterschool program and to children, ages five to 14, with developmental disabilities.



HALLANDALE BEACH

The City of Hallandale Beach hosted 17 student ambassadors from Gulfstream Middle School during the city’s Fourth Annual Government Day event. The students were divided into groups that spent the morning with one of six different departments, including police, fire, development services, parks and recreation, human services, and public works. Then, the students met at City Hall, where they were greeted by the mayor, commissioners and additional city staff. During a working pizza lunch, the students prepared presentations about what they had learned to share with their fellow classmates. The event ended with the students visiting the city commission chambers, where they received participation certificates.



HAWTHORNE

This was the third year that Chester Shell Elementary School’s fifth-grade class has visited City Hall. The mayor and city manager used the League’s “ABCs of City Government” to teach the class about how their city government works. During a mock election that followed, students ran for a commission seat. Those elected took a seat on the dais and selected a mayor and vice mayor. The “kids commission” appointed a city attorney, city clerk and city manager, who in turn hired various city department heads from the class. This helped the students to understand how many people it takes to run a city.

HILLIARD

The Town of Hilliard passed a resolution recognizing Florida City Government Week and held an essay contest for fourth-grade students at Hilliard Elementary School. The contest theme was “If I was the Mayor of the Town of Hilliard, I would...” Hilliard’s mayor chose three winners, each of whom received a certificate. In addition, the first place winner received \$25, the second place winner received \$15, and the third place winner received \$10. The awards were presented at Hilliard Elementary School.



HOLLYWOOD

Hollywood’s mayor issued a resolution recognizing Florida City Government Week and encouraged all Florida city officials to participate in the activities. The city presented Code Enforcement Officer Thomas Pinder with its Diamond Service Award, which is the highest honor a city employee can receive. The award recognizes employees who consistently render superior service to the public and their

co-workers. Along with Pinder, nine other nominees were recognized. The city also recognized 70 employees who achieved service anniversaries. They total 1,095 years of combined service.



ISLAMORADA

Islamorada invited fifth-grade students to submit an essay titled “What Islamorada Government Means to Me.” Each school chose the top six essays. Then, a local reporter chose one essay from each school for the top prize. Also, an art contest with the theme “When I think of Islamorada government, I think of.....” was held for third-grade students. Each school chose the top six pieces. A local artist selected the top piece, which was displayed at the Administrative Center and Public Safety Headquarters. Winners were recognized at a council meeting. In addition, the village hosted tours of various departments for social studies and civics classes.



LAKE ALFRED

The City of Lake Alfred approved a proclamation recognizing Florida City Government Week and held a mock commission meeting with the leadership team from the local middle school, Discovery Academy. The students were provided a written script, and each was assigned an active speaking part playing the roles of mayor, commissioners and various city staff. The “City Hall Experience” agenda included consideration of a resolution pertaining to “complete streets” and a grant funding request to help implement a bicycle and pedestrian safety program.



LAKE PARK

Lake Park adopted a resolution recognizing Florida City Government Week. Two local schools visited Town Hall to participate in a mock commission meeting, tour various city departments, watch a public works demonstration, and participate in a “recycling” program and an educational skit hosted by the library. Students received “My Town: I’m Part of It, I’m Proud of It” bumper stickers and wore the “My Town” buttons. The town also hosted a city government tent at its monthly sunset celebration held at the marina, which featured a local government game with prizes. All elected officials were there to meet with guests and answer questions.



LANTANA

The Town of Lantana passed a proclamation recognizing Florida City Government Week. The mayor and town manager also taught local and state history to approximately 160 students at Lantana Elementary School and Lantana Middle School.

MARGATE

The City of Margate hosted a Student Government Day with 19 Margate Middle School students and two teachers touring different city departments. They also held a mock commission meeting. A city commissioner guided the students as they played the roles of elected officials, staff and the public. After the meeting, the students toured the police department, fire department, water plant and public works department. The City Commission also passed a resolution recognizing Florida City Government Week.



NEW SMYRNA BEACH

The New Smyrna Beach City Commission adopted a resolution recognizing Florida City Government Week. The city also partnered with New Smyrna Beach High School and held a mock city commission meeting in the commission chambers. Students took the roles of elected and appointed city officials. During the mock meeting, the student commission considered action regarding existing regulations of tattoos and body piercing. Lunch was served upon adjournment.



ORANGE CITY

Orange City Elementary School's Student Government Association visited the Orange City council chambers to learn about their government and to tour the historic town hall. The students met with the mayor, council members and city manager, and they asked the city officials a variety of question. After a luncheon, the students were given various roles and participated in a mock council meeting, during which they voted on an ordinance.

NICEVILLE

The City of Niceville adopted a resolution for Florida City Government Week. In addition, approximately 100 students, seven teachers and volunteers from Edge Elementary School visited the Niceville city complex for a full day of learning and fun. They toured the fire department, police department and public library, and they met with the mayor. Students learned about their community and the various types of city jobs, along with the skills needed for those jobs. After the tour, the students spent some time at the Niceville children's park, which is part of the city complex.



ORANGE PARK

Orange Park partnered with Oakleaf Village Elementary school and conducted a presentation to two third-grade classes. The mayor talked to the students about his elected role and provided information on the functions and role of city government.



ORMOND BEACH

The Ormond Beach City Commission proclaimed October 23 as Employee Appreciation Day. The city thanked its employees for their service with a picnic lunch, recognition of significant work anniversaries, and honored specific employees for their "Above-and-Beyond" achievements over the year. Also, the fire department visited pre-schools and elementary schools and spoke to more than 200 children.



PALATKA

A group of local students from Crescent City Junior/Senior High School took over for Palatka city commissioners, holding a mock commission meeting during Palatka's city government week activities. BOYZ II MEN, a faith-based mentoring group for young men 10 to 17 years old, spent the afternoon at City Hall before beginning Palatka's regular City Commission meeting with their own "mock" meeting. The group of more than 30 students held an election in preparation of the mock commission meeting. Prior to carrying out their "elected" duties, the students learned about city government and careers from local officials and professionals.



PARKER

The City of Parker hosted local students to take part in a variety of activities. The students worked with fire rescue staff, learned about water meters and the public works department, and served as honorary staff and elected official for the day. The students also held a press conference to discuss their honorary roles and their ideas for improving their city. A proclamation was adopted recognizing the honorary city officials.



PARKLAND

Approximately 350 third-grade students visited the City of Parkland City Hall Complex over the course of two days. The students met with city commissioners, the city manager and city staff, and they participated in a question-and-answer session that taught them about the inner workings of their city government. Students also took a tour of the fire station and police department, along with receiving a “backstage” tour of the city’s library.



PORT ST. LUCIE

Port St. Lucie residents enjoyed several events recognizing Florida City Government Week, beginning with a council resolution about the importance of local government. Then, elected officials, staff, business owners and residents enjoyed a week of memories at events

such as Latin Dance night, and they rediscovered the city’s oldest asset — the St. Lucie River — at a sunset gathering on the boardwalk. They also celebrated a dog park grand opening, gathered for the unveiling of a beautiful new butterfly mosaic in the Botanical Gardens and attended a plant sale.



SANFORD

City of Sanford officials visited area schools and spoke to students about city government. The mayor, city manager and a police captain visited students at four elementary schools and shared information about their roles and how young people can play a part in being good citizens. The students learned about the meaning and importance of public service and the many services provided by the city.



SEMINOLE

The City of Seminole City Council adopted a resolution recognizing Florida City Government Week in the recently built mock-council chambers at the St. Petersburg College Seminole campus. The new, tiered classroom was constructed based upon the city’s actual council chamber at City Hall. Students in the college’s public policy administration degree program attended the council meeting.



ST. AUGUSTINE

The City of Augustine’s mayor and commissioners partnered with local elementary schools. Each of the five commissioners visited a school and led the morning announcements with the Pledge of Allegiance. The commissioners also distributed the “My City” buttons and

bumper stickers to all students and teachers, and they presented a certificate of appreciation to each of the schools for their continuing participation in city government week.



TARPON SPRINGS

The City of Tarpon Springs' mayor and city clerk swore-in student council officers from Tarpon Springs Elementary School. The ceremony was held in the commission chamber at City Hall. Third-, fourth- and fifth-grade "senators" were also sworn-in. Among other things, the mayor encouraged the students to be active on their council and also to participate in the civics programs in their school. The press and public were invited to attend. "My City" buttons and bumper stickers were made available to students and public.



WESTON

The City of Weston issued a proclamation recognizing Florida City Government Week and published an article about the week and the role of government in its weekly online newsletter, *Newsday Tuesday*. The city also initiated Weston University, an annual civic education program teaching select high school students about municipal government and public sector occupations. The program encourages students to realize their potential to shape and influence government as well as the educational partnerships between city government and schools.



WINDERMERE

For the ninth year, the Town of Windermere welcomed Windermere Elementary School's third-grade students to Town Hall. Six classes visited Town Hall over two mornings. They learned about the town's

government from the mayor, and about public safety from Windermere's police chief and Ocoee's fire chief. The town officials and first responders educated the students on what it takes to run a town, protect residents and how tax dollars are spent.

Cities Adopting Resolutions

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|------------------|-------------------|
| Auburndale | Lake Park |
| Bartow | Lake Worth |
| Belleair Beach | Lantana |
| Brooksville | Margate |
| Cape Canaveral | New Smyrna Beach |
| Coconut Creek | Niceville |
| Fernandina Beach | Palatka |
| Fort Pierce | Parker |
| Gainesville | Polk City |
| Hialeah | Port St. Lucie |
| Hilliard | Seminole |
| Hollywood | Sunny Isles Beach |
| Juno Beach | Webster |
| Lake Alfred | Weston |

Civic Education in Florida

Efforts like Florida City Government Week are very important. They help residents understand how city governments contribute to their quality of life, and they raise the civic IQ of those participating.

As stated in the 2011 Florida Civic Health Index (compiled by the Lou Frey Institute, the National Conference on Citizenship and others):

"In terms of volunteerism, voter turnout and other measures of civic engagement, Florida has consistently ranked near the bottom among the 50 states. The implications of this for the future civic health of the Sunshine State are enormous, given that they soon will be the largest single voting cohort in the nation."

In addition, statistics show that 30 percent of Floridians are natives, while 70 percent moved here from somewhere else. This can greatly affect a Floridian's understanding of state and local government in the Sunshine State.

Municipal officials can play a big part in helping to educate residents about their city government. Florida City Government Week is one way to make that happen. Everyone benefits from an informed public!

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