



CIVIC EDUCATION

Florida City Government Week

An education in city government and civic involvement

by Sharon G. Berrian
Florida League of Cities

In Florida **Gov. Rick Scott's** resolution observing October 18-24, 2015, as **Florida City Government Week**, he reminded citizens that this week “offers an important opportunity to convey to all of the citizens in Florida that they can shape and influence government through their civic involvement.” It is a message cities throughout the state give their constituencies each and every day. City government is the government closest to the people and has the most direct daily impact on its residents. Florida City Government Week provides a great opportunity for citizens to receive more information about how cities operate and the services they provide.



The following are highlights of how some of Florida's cities recognized the week:

ARCADIA



Arcadia officials held a mock city council meeting with the seventh-grade civics classes of DeSoto Middle School. They guided the class through the city council meeting and helped them to make decisions on how to deal with the items on the agenda. The **City of Arcadia** owns a 1926 fire engine that was displayed for the class to view after the meeting.

BELLE GLADE



Area students enhanced their knowledge of city government by touring City Hall and attending commission meetings. During one of the meetings, two students were given the opportunity to fill the seats of two absent city officials. Additionally, local schools participated in a contest to design the **Belle Glade** city flag. Each of the seven area schools selected a flag design to represent their school. Glades Central Community High School won the contest for its design pictured above.

BROOKSVILLE



The **City of Brookville's** Police Department held tours of its facilities. Citizens were given a command briefing, as well as an overview of patrol activities, canine operations and traffic camera enforcement operations, followed by a question-and-answer period. Numerous students and parents took part in the tours, which were enjoyed by both the participants and the police officers. Because of the

overwhelming success of the event, the Police Department plans to hold more tours in the future.

CAPE CANAVERAL



The **City of Cape Canaveral** continued its partnership with Cape View Elementary School. Teachers and volunteers were hosted by each city department, including the Cape Canaveral Volunteer Fire Department, and the Brevard County Sheriff's Office. Almost 400 students participated in activities such as a mock city council meeting, mock code enforcement board meeting, and a tour and demonstrations of Public Works Services. It was an excellent opportunity for the students to see how municipal government works and how it directly impacts their day-to-day lives.

DAVENPORT

The **City of Davenport** hosted an Open House to showcase city operations and some current city projects. Each department displayed tables with informational items, pictures and brochures relating to the department. “My City...I’m Part of It, I’m Proud of It” pins and bumper stickers were handed out to each attendee and were also handed out at City Hall.



DELTONA



Photo by Barry Koven

The **City of Deltona** held a photo contest for amateur and professional photographers of all ages. They were invited to enter their best images celebrating “My City: I’m Part of It, I’m Proud of It.”



FORT WALTON BEACH



The **City of Fort Walton Beach** held an Employee Appreciation Luncheon during which they recognized employees for length of service and presented employee and manager of the year awards.

GAINESVILLE



For the 10th year, the **City of Gainesville** hosted Alachua County’s fifth-grade “Citizens of the Month.” Fifteen students spent a day learning about the role city government plays in the lives of Gainesville’s residents. The students toured City Hall, a recreation center, a fire station and the traffic management center, and they met a K-9 unit. The students also met with Commissioner Craig Carter and participated in a mock commission meeting so they could see first-hand the important decisions commissioners regularly face.

GREENACRES



The **City of Greenacres** Leisure Services Department coordinated five presentations for seventh-grade civics classes at two area middle schools. Mayor Samuel J. Ferreri was treated like a celebrity at LC Swain Middle School, where a banner welcomed him and the band performed. He spoke to more than 175 students about local government and the city’s history, and he answered students’ questions. Department directors coordinated student tours at City Hall; and the afterschool program used the League’s publication, “ABCs of City Government,” and built a mock city with a dream park and new bus, which were displayed at an Open House attended by elected officials and parents.

HAWTHORNE



The **City of Hawthorne** spoke to two middle school civics classes and hosted the Hawthorne Middle/High School Student Government at City Hall. Principal Libby Hartwell and staff asked Mayor Matt Surrency to speak with the middle school students about the importance of local government. He emphasized that the government closest to the people is the most responsive to the people it serves.

HILLIARD



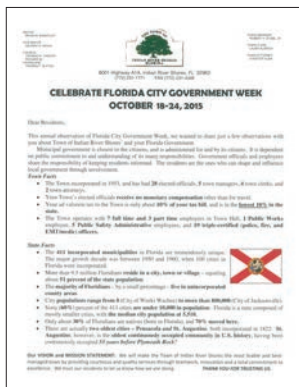
An essay contest was held for fourth-grade students at Hilliard Elementary School. The essays began with "If I was the Mayor of the **Town of Hilliard**, I would....." The winners were: First Place **Kaitlyn Williams** (\$30); Second Place **Rieley Taylor** (\$20); and Third Place **Heath Ray** (\$10). Supporting the efforts were Mayor David Buchanan and Hilliard Elementary School Principal Lee Ann Jackson.

HOLLYWOOD

The **City of Hollywood** posted the Florida Local Government Coalition video to the city's YouTube site, where it is currently available for viewing.

INDIAN RIVER SHORES

An **Indian River Shores** council meeting was held during the week with a packed chamber. Citizens received a variety of city information. Also, staff took the opportunity to recognize the elected officials, board and committee members who give much with no remuneration, and voiced appreciation for their dedication and service. They echoed back with gratitude for the staff who keep everything operating smoothly.



KISSIMMEE



The **City of Kissimmee** began its annual six-week School of Government program. The citizen students meet every Thursday night to get a firsthand look at the City of Kissimmee operations and programs through hands-on activities, interactive tours and events. The first class met on October 22 at Lakefront Park for an evening with the Parks and Recreation Department. The director gave a tour of the park and students got a sneak peek into the city's annual Haunted House.

LAKE MARY



Students from Crystal Lake Elementary in **Lake Mary** participated in City Government Day where they saw demonstrations and displays from the city's Fire, Police, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works departments. Included were a police K-9 demonstration, fire and rescue trucks, investigations, SWAT, patrol and more.



LAKE WORTH

Commissioner Andy Amoroso organized a tour of City Hall for students from elementary schools in **Lake Worth** where they met all the employees, including the city manager, and the mayor in the commission chambers. The students had questions for the elected officials and city manager. Most of the questions were related to how an elected official's job can improve the residents' quality of life. Students who participated were given stickers and school supplies.



MARGATE



Hosted by the City Clerk's Office, 34 students from **Margate** STEM Magnet Middle School spent Student Government Day learning about the day-to-day operations of the city, touring city departments and getting an up-close view of police, fire and public works equipment and vehicles. The students ran a mock commission meeting with the help of Mayor Joanne Simone, Vice Mayor Tommy Ruzzano, City Manager Douglas Smith, City Attorney Eugene Steinfeld and City Clerk Joseph Kavanagh.



NEW SMYRNA BEACH



With the bang of a gavel at the mayor's seat on the City Commission dais, an hour-long mock city commission meeting conducted by **New Smyrna Beach** High School students got under way. Nine students filled roles as elected officials, the city clerk, city manager, police chief and city attorney. The remainder of the world history/criminal justice class served as engaged citizens. The students discussed possible enhancements to security at current and future city parks, including lighting and solar security cameras. Since 2012, New Smyrna Beach City Clerk Johnny Bledsoe worked with the students' teacher, Paul Woodard, and city staff to provide a field activity to enhance course learning.

OCEAN BREEZE



The **Town of Ocean Breeze** invited residents to participate in a civic event with refreshments at Town Hall. Council President Ann Kagdis spoke about celebrating the town to bring about awareness of the role of city government.

OKEECHOBEE

2015 marked the **City of Okeechobee's** centennial. One of its celebratory events was a Heritage Festival that coincided with Florida City Government Week. The event featured historical displays and demonstrations representing Okeechobee's rich agricultural history. The Okeechobee Community Theater gave a special performance, "The Spirits of Okeechobee," highlighting several of the very colorful people and events of Okeechobee's history over the past 100 years. The high school marching band performed its award-winning show titled "Postcards from Okeechobee," featuring historical photos and music from the time period when Okeechobee became a city. The mayor encouraged officials and employees to actively promote civic education and awareness throughout the community.

ORANGE CITY



Orange City Elementary School's Student Government Association visited the Orange City Council Chambers to celebrate city government and were given a lesson on how the city is run. They met and ate lunch with City Council members. After a lesson on local government and the history of Orange City, staff asked the students to participate in a drawing contest. They were asked to draw what Orange City means to them. Students did a great job and also answered trivia questions about Orange City. They then toured City Hall and the Police and Fire departments.

PARKER



Parker officials placed government operations in the hands of elementary school students who took the reins as honorary mayor, police chief, fire chief and public works supervisor for the day. Parker Elementary School fifth graders competed in an essay contest that posed the question, "If you were Mayor of Parker for the day and someone gave you \$100,000, how would you spend it?" The students spent the day learning about the functions of city government, touring the departments, looking down a manhole and seeing a demonstration from K-9 dogs Marlin and Rex. The event is in its third year.

PARKLAND



Hundreds of school children from three elementary schools were greeted and educated at City Hall (government operations), the **Parkland** Library (education) and Emergency Services Complex (Police and Fire departments), and were provided with giveaways. The mayor, commissioners and city manager were on hand to interact with children as was the director of library services and fire-rescue and police personnel, who demonstrated emergency equipment and provided safety tips.

PORT ST. LUCIE

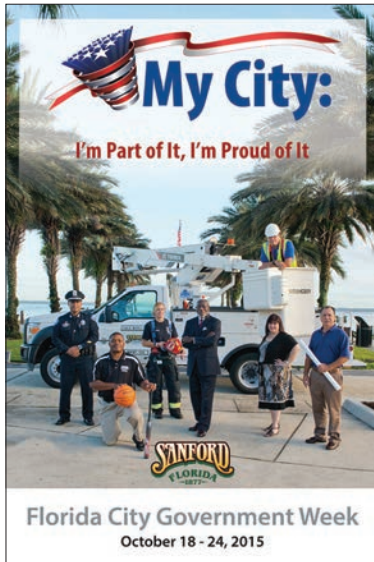


Residents of **Port St. Lucie** attended a series of "mini-talks" about each city department's major responsibilities. They had the opportunity to ask questions to enhance their understanding of each department. A partnership with the school district provided seventh graders with an opportunity to learn from the leaders of the community. City Council members visited several schools and presented their views on public policy, as well as information on their roles as elected officials. This enabled the city to break ground on a new partnership with the schools. This was the first year that Port St. Lucie participated in Florida City Government Week.



SANFORD

Sanford held a "Walk and Learn" with Mayor Jeff Triplett and City Manager Norton Bonaparte, beginning at Veterans Memorial Park. The mayor gave a brief overview of local government, how city parks are an important public service and help to increase the health and wellness of the community, and how the Youth Council is an integral component to the success and future of Sanford. A question-and-answer session was held prior to the leisurely two-mile stroll along the RiverWalk. In addition, Sanford Environmental Coordinator Hope Duncan spoke about "fat free" sewers at a business connections meeting of the Greater Sanford Regional Chamber of Commerce. The mayor, Sanford Police Department and the Mayor's Youth Council were introduced to the community on the 40-yard line at Sanford's Seminole High School home football game.



SEMINOLE



A three-hour class for Eckerd College students was held at **Seminole** City Hall during the spring 2015 term in early recognition of Florida City Government Week. A mock city council meeting was conducted by Mayor Leslie Waters and the students. Presentations by Fire Chief Heather Burford and Community Development Mark Ely were also provided.

STUART



Stuart Middle School students learned about city government and how it operates from Mayor Kelli Glass Leighton, who spoke to a student assembly. Third, fourth and fifth grade students from JD Parker Elementary learned about the importance of healthy relationships when serving in a leadership role from Commissioner Tom Campenni, and Commissioner Eula Clarke engaged students in a mock city government role, where they provided input about issues that matter to them.

WESTON



The **City of Weston** kicks off the Weston University program annually during Florida City Government Week. The program gives a select number of high school students the opportunity to learn about municipal government by participating in a one-day-long session per month for seven months. Now in its 13th year, the program has been highly successful, and is actively pursued by students who wish to participate. The students' activities are promoted to residents through city and other local media, all spotlighting city government operations and services as well as school partnerships.

PROCLAMATIONS:

**Auburndale • Brooksville • Davenport • Fort Pierce • Greenacres • Hastings • Hawthorne
Indian River Shores • Jupiter • Okeechobee • Sanford**

Sharon G. Berrian is associate director of membership development for the Florida League of Cities. **QC**