



COUNTY ADMINISTRATION:

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT SERIES: THE CLUB OF HONEST CITIZENS

The Club of Honest ~~Whigs~~ Citizens



Eat. Drink. Think.

LIVELY DISCUSSION: ENGAGING CITIZENS AS CO-CREATORS

In its continuous effort and commitment to engage citizens through unique and meaningful programs, this year the County partnered with the Village Square to create the Club of Honest Citizens. The program, which was inspired by Benjamin Franklin's Club of Honest Whigs, provided opportunities for social interaction between citizens and County Government. The Club of Honest Citizens built upon the mutual goals of the County and Village Square of developing programming that encourage sustained citizen involvement and engagement through social attachment which is considered to be one of the best predictors of performance of public institutions, the

economic success of communities and well-being of individuals.

For the inaugural year, three Club of Honest Citizens events were held in intimate social settings in order to encourage lively debate and exchange of ideas. The theme of the Club of Honest Citizens was "if government is the problem, what is the solution?" Citizens were invited to participate in dialogues on the roles of County government and citizens in shaping the community. This created a forum for fierce community collaboration as citizens, County Commissioners, and County staff exchanged information and ideas, while building long-term and engaging relationships.

A FOUNDING DEBATE at Madison Social March 27, 2014



[OUR OPINION |

Engaged

County and Village Square team up again

In the hubbub over the mute button with which the mayor can silence citizens speaking at City Commission meetings, there is a point that may be overlooked: Citizens should feel engaged with their government long before arguing over who has control of a microphone. That's why city and county commissioners, as well as other officials, take part in the town hall forums and "Speed Date Your Local Leaders" events sponsored by The Village Square. It's why the county offered its Citizen Engagement Series in 2012 and 2013. And it's why the county and The Village Square now are teaming up for a new series called "The Club of Honest Citizens."

They're all efforts to help leaders know the issues better and to let citizens and their leaders know each other better. "When citizen engagement is 30 minutes at the podium, we're in trouble," County Administrator Vince Long said. The name "The Club of Honest Citizens" is borrowed from Ben Franklin, whose "Club of Honest Whigs" would meet to discuss a range of issues in the coffee-houses and taverns of London. Three sessions are planned, each at a different venue. This Thursday evening, about 50 citizens will gather at Madison Social at College Town with county commissioners and staff to discuss "What is the proper role of government?" On May 4, the club moves to RedEye Coffee in Midtown, and the final get-together will be a pot luck dinner (recipes included) on June 12 at St. John's Episcopal Church. Here's the bad news: All the available spots are filled, and Village Square Executive Director Liz Joyner hopes the 50 who have signed up will attend all

three sessions. But if you're interested, register anyway (<http://tothevillagesquare.org>). A few spots are certain to open up, and the interest you express could spur similar efforts. Because it's not always easy to reach people whose voices aren't being heard. Ms. Joyner acknowledged that Village Square events tend to draw participants who are older and white. Mr. Long was checking the list of those who had signed up for the "Club," hoping it wouldn't be the same people who attend commission meetings (he did see some new names). County Commission Chairwoman Kristin Dozier expressed hope that people new to the process could become "ambassadors," helping others become engaged. "If we're successful, we'll keep doing this," Ms. Dozier said. It beats a mute button any day.

Tallahassee Democrat



**COFFEE &
SOPHISTICATED
THOUGHT**
at Redeye Coffee
May 4, 2014



**Ye Olde Neighborly
Gathering
at the Square
June 12, 2014**



LEON COUNTY
PARTNERS WITH
VILLAGE SQUARE

