

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Dylan Zelazo

401-728-0500 ext. 268

dzelazo@pawtucketri.com

**BUILDING BRIDGES IN PAWTUCKET'S MUNICIPAL WORKPLACE
PAVES THE WAY FOR LASTING IMPROVEMENTS**

Investments in Leadership Practices and Workplace Culture are Paying Dividends to the City

PAWTUCKET -- Leveraging new leadership tools and problem-solving skills, city leaders are seeing improvements in process efficiencies, smarter use of budgets, and even improved interdepartmental relationships.

“Not all of Pawtucket’s bridge improvements are built of concrete and steel,” said Pawtucket Mayor Donald R. Grebien. “Building bridges between our City’s municipal departments also is paving the way to continued progress. And like the visible ones, these bridges are building momentum by maximizing resources and improving service to our citizens,” he added.

Mayor Grebien and other leaders in Pawtucket are crediting a program called Leadership Matters RI as a key driver in recent positive shifts. In part, it has enabled the city’s workers to better collaborate across functions in order to identify and implement improvements.

The program is a result of a partnership between the Pell Center at Salve Regina University and a non-profit created by public leaders called the Public Sector Consortium. Its long-term goal is to provide an ongoing resource for public leaders to help them continuously improve their leadership skills and to leverage best practices from other cities and towns. Four members of Pawtucket’s municipal leadership are participating in the inaugural program, together with leaders from Middletown, Newport, and Salve Regina University.

How the program works

The Leadership Matters program promotes an outcomes-centered approach to leadership. It works to teach participants a different way of thinking and approaching challenges from the perspective of shared goals. The participants learn new tools and methods to help change the way problems are addressed. They also learn how to promote a culture of shared outcomes and innovative solutions to improve municipal efficiency and effectiveness.

The program is delivered in three phases. The first is focused on concepts including facilitative leadership, systems thinking, cross-functional collaboration, negotiation, and aligning goals with resources. Phase II requires the teams to identify an existing challenge in their town or city and to use the tools and methods from Phase I to address them. The last phase focuses on sharing lessons learned and how to continue building a culture of collaboration and mutual support across communities.

As the program steward for Pawtucket, Mayor Grebien nominated the City's other three participants. In a bold move, he selected city Director of Finance Joanna L'Heureux and the CFO of the School Department Melissa Devine-- two departments that are working to build shared systems and improved services. The fourth participant is Director of Constituent Services Dylan Zelazo.

Changing the culture of local government

"Even though we've only completed the first phase of the program, already we're seeing tangible improvements in operational efficiency – which means we're more effectively using our human and financial resources," said program participant Dylan Zelazo, director of constituent services and communications. "We also realized that whether you're a natural leader or someone who needs to work at it, public leadership is a profession like any other. Skills and practices can be learned and improved," he added.

This training is translating into hard dollar savings and improved efficiencies. Melissa Devine, Pawtucket School Department's CFO and fellow program participant said, "Traditionally, my team faced differences with the city's Finance team. When the going gets tough, our groups are no different than other workplaces. We become frustrated with each other and focus on the symptoms of the problem. This was one of the most useful and impactful programs of my career, because what we've learned has made such a difference," she said.

Devine and Pawtucket CFO Joanna L'Heureux learned strategies to help their teams to work together, moving beyond the symptoms to identify the real causes, which often are broken or misaligned systems. One they identified was the fact that the two departments were using different software systems for accounting, purchasing, personnel and payroll. The inefficiencies and disconnectedness of the computer systems was maligning efficiency and straining relationships.

"By integrating each team's program – essentially getting the systems to 'talk' to each other -- our teams literally were on the same page when it came to running reports and looking at data," said L'Heureux. "And because of our improved interpersonal communication and working relationships, we're also working to do things like ordering supplies together, which lowers our prices due to the combined volume," she added.

"It's not easy to shift the culture, but once we started seeing it work, it motivated us to do even more. It was like 'Wow, this stuff really works!'" said L'Heureux. Now, the teams even hold joint staff meetings. In April, L'Heureux was named CFO of the Year by the Providence Business News in part due to her significant contributions to improving efficiencies and reducing costs.

Public Works and Zoning also are working to improve the way that they work. Key topics for their teams are improving management of resources and shifting the way they interact with members of the public by treating them like a business would treat its customers.

“I’m so encouraged by the progress from this first phase,” said Mayor Grebien. “Seeing that it’s improving our service to Pawtucket’s citizens and maximizing our human and financial resources is so rewarding. We’re making a smart investment in the future of Pawtucket. I’m really looking forward to Phase II,” concluded Mayor Grebien.

The Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy at Salve Regina is a multidisciplinary research center focused at the intersection of politics, policies and ideas. Dedicated to honoring Sen. Claiborne Pell's legacy, the center promotes American engagement in the world, effective government at home and civic participation by all Americans.

The Public Sector Consortium is a nationally focused non-profit organization based in Cambridge, MA and dedicated to helping leaders in the public sector to create and sustain high-performing organizations. The Consortium partners with leaders and citizens at all levels of government to reinvent the practice of public leadership for the public good.

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