



Our Youth Leading the Way

Sugar Land students learn about local government and leadership on the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council

Written by Gabe Reaume

M Meeting with elected officials, volunteering alongside government employees, and learning the ins and outs of each department of the City of Sugar Land may not seem like typical activities for high school students. For one lucky group of Sugar Land juniors, though, serving on the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) has afforded them the perfect way to learn about local government, while developing their leadership skills and having fun. Student Baher Michel enjoyed all the inside looks he got into multiple future projects in Sugar Land, along with the insight such an opportunity brings. "I gained a deeper understanding of all the various internal branches and departments of local government," he shares.

Encouraging Public Service

Former Sugar Land Mayor David Wallace created the MYAC seven years ago to help encourage youth leadership and involvement in the community and municipal government. The program strives to emphasize the role of local government in Sugar Land area students' everyday lives and help them learn the value of giving back through public service to others. "MYAC introduces students to public service in their hometown," says Sugar Land Mayor James A. Thompson. "We hope this program teaches them more about their community, inspiring them to become involved in continuing to make Sugar Land a great place to live."



Council members participate in an Earth Day event at Town Square, in partnership with Keep Sugar Land Beautiful



MYAC members meet about once every month and participate in many community activities throughout the year

Being Selected to Serve

The journey to be considered for MYAC is not an easy or quick one. The selection process has been competitive every year since the program's inception. Applicants must first submit a completed application that includes general information about themselves, along with writing an essay and providing both a letter of recommendation and a parent permission form.

Applicants must also reside within the current corporate city limits of Sugar Land or in the communities of Greatwood, New Territory, or Riverstone with which the City of Sugar Land has an annexation agreement. Applicants who meet the basic requirements participate in small-group interviews to determine their commitment to meet all responsibilities, including meeting monthly and participating in community volunteer activities. The lucky members for the 2011-2012 program were chosen back in November, and unlike other years, the present group's membership is restricted to high school juniors.

Not Your Average Meeting

MYAC members meet about once every month during the program. The first meeting serves as an induction and orientation to the program. At this meeting, MYAC members elect a slate of officers, including a president, historian, sergeant at arms, and service officer.

They also have a mock city council meeting, where members are assigned roles as city council members, staff, and citizens to replicate a real-life meeting. Another meeting focuses exclusively on community issues - this is a brainstorming session known as the "think tank." It allows MYAC members

to discuss community issues and provide feedback to the mayor and city staff. MYAC members learn that their opinion matters and that their voice as a citizen is heard by their local government.

A favorite meeting of many past MYAC members involves a comprehensive city tour offering an in-depth look at behind-the-scenes activities of local government. In addition to visits to a wastewater treatment plant and the Sugar Land Regional Airport, members tour the police department and a fire station. It may seem like a lot of time to commit, but to those who are dedicated and eager, it is a fun and fulfilling opportunity that many youth may never get to have. "It was a great experience!" shares former member Nikki Gulgun.

Future Leaders

Throughout the year, MYAC members meet many elected city officials and staff members across several different departments. Many times they come to realize that it takes both outstanding policy guidance from elected officials and a great number of talented individuals across several disciplines to provide exceptional service to citizens each day.

The MYAC program ends with recognition from the city council in the summer months, complete with a certificate signed by the mayor. With the leadership and support of the mayor, city council, and fellow residents to guide them, MYAC members are learning valuable skills that will help make them the next generation of active and productive citizens. **SLM**

GABE REAUME stays busy by working as the budget and management analyst for the City of Sugar Land and oversees the day-to-day operations of the MYAC.

LEARN ABOUT The Mayor's Youth Advisory Council
 Keep track of the 2011-2012 group's activities at sugarlandtx.gov/programs/myac/index.asp

