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THE EMERGING LEADERS NETWORK

220 REASONS TO BE HOPEFUL FOR TORONTO'S FUTURE

By Rebecca Geller, Communications and Events Officer, Toronto City Summit Alliance

In an era where people are labeled apathetic and unengaged, the more than 220 committed city-builders of Emerging Leaders Network (ELN) are making a bold statement about a new generation of leaders. An initiative of the Toronto City Summit Alliance, the Emerging Leaders Network is a forum for rising leaders to share their ideas, skills and connections. Members are committed to enhancing their leadership skills to act on a vision of the Toronto region as a vibrant place to live, work and play.

Mission: Building the next generation of civic entrepreneurs. Economic growth and prosperity are driven by innovation, and that innovation can be encouraged.



The ELNstudio. Photos by Shaun Merritt and Tamara Balan.

the ELN has endeavoured to inspire new ways of thinking about the citizen's role in advancing our city, and to provide a forum for action and collaboration around the issues facing the city region.

A unique program with a unique beginning, the ELN was founded as a means for some of Toronto's most influential leaders to pass the torch to a new generation of up-and-coming stars. In 2006, David Pecaut, visionary and founder of the Toronto City Summit Alliance, was determined to establish a program that aimed to foster local leadership talents. Each member of the Alliance's Steering Committee was tasked with identifying one rising leader to participate in the inaugural year of the program.

"The ELN is about both developing our future leaders and developing our city," said Alliance Chair and founding member of the Alliance Steering Committee, John Tory. "The initial goal was to expand the network of engaged Toronto region residents to include emerging leaders - those who were not instantly recognizable but who were passionate and resourceful people, determined to implement their creative ideas for making the region an

even more dynamic place. As established leaders, we recognized that it is our responsibility to look to these up-and-coming leaders to challenge the status quo. Embracing new perspectives and fresh ideas is the only way to collectively tackle the complex challenges facing the Toronto region."

The ELN began as a series of monthly meetings to network, lend advice to fellow members, connect with established city-building leaders, and hear about exciting transformational projects underway. The founding ELN members were a diverse group of middle to senior level managers and VPs in the public, private, and non-profit sectors characterized by their commitment to contributing to the success of the Toronto region. Together with the Alliance Steering Committee, the newly-formed ELN put together a program to expand networks of influence to new players and provide members with a platform to effect real change.

Maintaining this diversity and mandate, the membership has grown from the initial 50 to more than 220 people who cross professional, social and geographic boundaries and are employing creative approaches to city-building issues.

Part forum, part vehicle for active collaboration and part community

A “Choose Your Own Adventure” approach to city-building, the Emerging Leaders Network offers up-and-coming and established leaders several ways to get involved with the initiative. Each program component is designed to appeal to the aspects of networking, leadership, and city-building – the elements that form the basis of the group's mission.

ELNnetworks is a series of monthly gatherings that connect the ELN's rising and established leaders. This isn't just your everyday networking reception. ELNnetworks takes members out to explore the city on site visits, talking candidly with established leaders about their journeys and giving fellow members an opportunity to present and get feedback on initiatives they are developing.

ELNprojects are city-building projects taken on by ELN working groups to address the issues facing the city region. The topics for the current projects came out of the April 2009 ELN Working Summit. There, the project ideas were evaluated by a panel of established leaders who assessed the viability of the ideas, providing suggestions and mentorship to the project groups. Topics for the current ELNprojects include: retaining and attracting expatriate innovators and leaders back to Toronto; strengthening municipal electoral processes; animating the pedestrian John Street corridor; increasing awareness around the value of diversity; and addressing issues related to poverty.

The current ELNprojects include:

- Attracting the next generation of leaders and innovators who have gone abroad back to Toronto
- Animating John Street: Creating an arts and cultural spine and creative hub in downtown Toronto;
- Creating a Living Library of Torontonians from diverse backgrounds to build cross-cultural networks;
- Exploring municipal voting reform to increase the effectiveness and diversity of Toronto and other municipal councils
- Enhancing awareness and dispelling myths about poverty through outreach and engagement with senior leaders.

ELNstudio is a one-day seminar event that represents the next phase in the development of city-building projects in which ELN members have invested thousands of volunteer hours. The Studio is the chance for ELN members to roll up their collective sleeves and continue to build the projects presented at the ELN Working Summit, with the added input of subject area experts.

Advancing our City

The ELN leaders are taking the reins of their city. Members of the Emerging Leaders Network are engaging in dynamic conversations and fostering ideas that will provide the foundation for improving the Toronto region.

The ELN's ambitious 2010 agenda reflects the momentum of a thriving group, explains ELN Co-chair Mitzie Hunter, CAO of Toronto Community Housing. “As ELN Co-Chair, it is a privilege to lead and guide this incredible group of rising leaders who want nothing more than to use their resources, time and expertise to ensure that the future of the city is healthy, vibrant and prosperous. The energy and passion is palpable when the members of the ELN gather to make their mark on their city. I am excited about the future of the Toronto region, knowing that ELN members will be part of that leadership.”

The Emerging Leaders Network continues to shape, test and validate new initiatives, and provides a forum for those with great ideas to create and inspire. This unique space for ideation and experimentation on building on the health and wealth of the Toronto region acts as a marketplace for energetic volunteers to find the solution-oriented projects they have been seeking. There is nothing more important to the future of our cities than equipping those who will lead them. Now, more than ever, the Toronto region needs people who will create a more prosperous future. As new issues emerge, so too will the need for new leaders to tackle them by collaborating in innovative ways.



The Emerging Leaders Network (www.elnonline.ca) is an initiative of the Toronto City Summit Alliance (www.torontoalliance.ca), a coalition of civic leaders who develop and launch solutions to pressing social and economic challenges in the Toronto region. For more information on the ELN or to inquire about joining, contact Tamara Balan, ELN Program Manager, Toronto City Summit Alliance at tamara.balan@torontocitysummit.ca.