After a year focusing on the economic and social well-being of Central Falls, Leadership Rhode Island is turning its attention to a dramatically different economic venue: Quonset Business Park.

The switch from a bankrupt city to a bustling business park as the site for Leadership in Action projects has prompted some to wonder, "Why Quonset?"

The business park is clearly one of the state’s great economic assets, and yet, at times, seemingly misunderstood or underrated for the value it brings to the Ocean State, says Mike Ritz (’07), executive director of LRI.

The decision to go to Quonset can be traced to the results of a 2012 survey in which alumni were asked: Where should we go next? Participants were asked to rank a variety of regional options, ranging from urban neighborhoods and specific cities to entire regions, such as the Blackstone Valley.

Alumni who favored the business park fell into two broad categories: those who see it as a strong economic asset, one that LRI might take to an even higher level, and those who see “un-realized potential” at Quonset and think LRI might be able to “rally resources and make things happen.”

“I would love to see what the curious and smart minds of our LRI leaders would propose to reinvigorate Quonset, develop cross-community partnerships and transform our state,” wrote Holly Jensen, (’08).

By selecting Quonset, LRI turns its collective brainpower toward one of Rhode Island’s major economic development efforts. Calls for innovative solutions have begun.

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

– Margaret Mead
Sharing treasure, time, talent

Who will provide the direction? That question, accompanied by an etching of a sailboat in choppy waters, was on the cover of LRI’s recruitment brochure in 1990. Inside were the smiling faces of the Kappa class holding a rope and surrounded by quotes about their experience in LRI’s core program. That provocative question inspired me to submit an application for the 1991 Lambda Class, the Best Class Ever.

LRI won an award from the National Association of Community Leadership Organizations for the design of the recruitment brochure, which was used for many years until online applications and email became the new way of life. While the method of applying to LRI may have changed, the core values of servant leadership and commitment to community outlined in that recruitment brochure have not wavered since LRI’s inception in 1981.

To ensure that participants wrestle with the urgent issues of the day, program content and even the session day titles have adjusted over the years. In 1991, for example, the Lambda class retreat was held a few days after Rhode Island’s Credit Unions were closed down.

That left some of our classmates unable to pay their tuition because they no longer had access to their bank accounts and it propelled the Rhode Island economy into session day discussions.

This year, staff made sure the controversy over using NECAP math scores as a graduation requirement got a prominent place in the Education Day program.

Still, some core experiences are too valuable to alter. Every class since 1986 has had an overnight retreat. The cost of which is the organization’s largest program expense after salaries. When the current recession took hold, the board weighed the costs and benefits and agreed unanimously that the winter retreat must survive. It is an essential component of the LRI experience, a key to creating the next “Best Class Ever.”

The first part of the Lambda’s retreat was at the Aldrich Mansion followed by sparse sleeping accommodations in the adjoining seminary with its dormitory-style bathrooms. This year the Iota IIs enjoyed the winter view from rustic semi-private rooms at Whispering Pines Lodge, dined on excellent food and took part in an illumination ceremony by an outdoor fire.

During my time on LRI’s board we completed the first Alpha to Omega cycle and are a third of the way through the second cycle. It is my sincere hope that LRI will continue to find Rhode Islanders willing to provide the direction when the third Alpha to Omega cycle begins in 2029! Please continue to support LRI with your treasure, time and talent.

By Katie Varney
Prepped by the professionals and coached by students, members of the current Leadership Rhode Island class huddled, gathered their wits and then came out fighting for and against this resolution: “The Rhode Island Department of Education should reverse its decision to make NECAP scores a high school graduation requirement.”

In a first for an LRI class, the Iota IIs experienced the pressure, excitement and heat of formal debate during the afternoon session of Education Day held at the Knight campus of CCRI in Warwick.

High school students, all members of the Rhode Island Urban Debate League, gave the 60 Iota IIs a crash course in the rules of debate, coaching them through the process of developing compelling arguments and counter-arguments and how to rattle their adversaries with revealing questions.

Available to arm the debaters with information to bolster their arguments were Jeremy Chiappetta, executive director of the Blackstone Valley Prep School; Jay Walsh, assistant executive director at National Education Association Rhode Island (NEAR/RI); Maryellen Butke (’06), principal at MEB Strategies; Patrick Crowley (’07), government relations director at NEAR/RI; and Heather Tow-Yick (’11), executive director at Teach for America Rhode Island.

Class members drew upon what they had learned earlier in the day from their interviews with eight principals representing K-12 schools with the highest and lowest NECAP scores – public, private, turnaround and charter schools.

After an hour of heated debate – actually the class split and held two separate debates on the same resolution – the teams arguing for the affirmative were declared the winners based upon the Ri-UDL judging criteria.

“I am much more informed regarding the NECAP and the challenges facing the education system in the state. Also, I feel like I’m ready to debate anyone! Those kids were so impressive!” Julie Maguire, a vice president at RBS Citizens Financial Group, wrote in her evaluation.

Calling Education Day the best so far this year, R.I. Public Utilities Commission-er Paul Roberti remarked, “The debate was effective and fostered team building and how to look at the issue from all sides.”

Before the session day, the Iota IIs were asked whether the decision to make NECAP test scores a graduation requirement should be reversed. The class was evenly divided, with 30 percent agreeing, 31 percent disagreeing and 39 percent with no opinion.

After the session day, class members had changed their views dramatically. Seventy percent agreed, 25 percent disagreed, and 5 percent had no opinion.

The education session wasn’t the only one this year closely aligned to the big news of the day. In February, the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) made headlines with the announcement that two board members were stepping down. The next day, the Iota IIs started their Economic Development Day meet- ing with Karl Wadensten, treasurer of the EDC board.

Wadensten, president of VIBCO manufacturing, led the class with a candid discussion about the EDC, lean manufactur- ing, and economic development in Rhode Island.

The class also heard from John R. “L.J.” Pagliarini, new chief staff at the EDC; Ken Block (’12), president, Simpatico Soft- ware Systems, Inc.; Ray Fogarty, director, Chafee Center for International Business at Bryant University; John Simmons, executive director, Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council; Neil Steinberg (’91), president and CEO, Rhode Island Founda- tion; and John Hazen White Jr., president and CEO of TACO, Inc.

“Being new to R.I., this session assisted me in gaining knowledge about R.I.’s economic development program, efforts underway at all levels to understand and address plaguing issues and to personally meet some of the key players,” wrote Tim Benson, vice president of claims at The Beacon Mutual Insurance Co.
So, who are you?

Dear LRI Alumni,

In this newsletter, you’ll not only get a glimpse of who we are, but you’ll learn what we’re doing and why we’re doing it. And for the first time in years, we’re asking you, our alumni, to not only renew your annual dues of basic membership, but to increase your membership level to ensure LRI’s advancement. Please see the enclosed brochure for details.

I’ve spent most of my life pondering who I am and what makes me tick. The answers at different points reflect my evolution as a person. This year’s theme – (L)RI: Who are we? – is intended to provide the lens through which the LRI IIs perceive critical topics, current events and themselves. Our theme provokes a similar existential experience for Leadership Rhode Island, an organization that, too, is evolving.

Our strength begins and ends with you. We are you. So, who are you? It’s indispensable that we are a vast Rhode Island network of talented, dynamic leaders from multiple sectors, bound together through a common experience, a bond steeped in service. We want what’s best for Rhode Island.

“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.” – Robert K. Greenleaf

Our service and commitment to Rhode Island is passionate and strong. Rhode Islanders read about us in the newspaper. They hear about us at functions. They feel our positive energy when we congregate. We grow more confident and are flattered when others attempt to emulate us. We built our knowledge, our character, our confidence, our empathy, our network and our loyalty in service to our home – Rhode Island. In many ways, our LRI relationships and experiences have made us who we are today.

As we take bolder actions to benefit Rhode Island, safeguarding our independence is more important than ever. Independence was inherent in the brilliant design of our founders and has been enhanced over the decades by the consistent nurturing of our alumni. Our business model relies on financing from multiple sources. We invest fees for service, i.e., tuition. We are freed from the dominance of a single donor or sole financial benefactor. We like it that way. Our independence requires it.

Elevating your membership dues contribution this year guarantees our self-sufficiency and signals authentic support for our invigorated, action-oriented direction. The unique nature of our independence will always rest in your hands. You are Rhode Island’s champions, visionaries and stewards, You are Leadership Rhode Island.

Mike Ritz '07
Chocolate bars raise $10K for students

Set up a community garden, run an after-school dance club, equip children with laptops, build a playground.

Asked by Leadership Rhode Island for ideas on how to promote healthy living and learning, the children of Central Falls came up with lots of constructive answers.

Students in kindergarten through third grade conveyed their visions in pictures and posters. Those in grades 4 to 8 described their proposals in writing.

The 45 top proposals are now in the hands of a panel of judges who will announce five finalists during Central Falls’ annual Earth Day celebration April 20.

LRI proposed the competition to find the best way to spend $10,000, the proceeds from the first year of sales of the Save Chocolateville bar as a sweet bridge linking colonial history to modern times. Central Falls got the unofficial name of Chocolateville back in the 18th and 19th centuries when it was home to the state’s first chocolate maker.

In the 21st century, the city is home to Garrison Confections, a gourmet chocolate business. Last year, Mike and Andrew Shotts, chef and owner of Garrison Confections, formed a nonprofit partnership to market the Save Chocolateville candy bars, with proceeds to benefit Central Falls children.

The venture coincided with a yearlong LRI effort to bring positive change to Central Falls.

The chocolate bar debuted at the University Heights Whole Foods store in Providence just before Valentine’s Day in 2012. Save Chocolateville bars may be purchased at AAA headquarters, the Royal Little Drive, Providence, and at AAA locations in Cranston, Warwick, Boston and Hamden, Conn. The bars also are sold in Central Falls at the Adams Memorial Library and at buyswithheart.org.

Central Falls students submitted creative proposals for how to spend the money raised through Save Chocolateville.

Think of the Save Chocolateville bar as a sweet bridge linking colonial history to modern times. Central Falls got the unofficial name of Chocolateville back in the 18th and 19th centuries when it was home to the state’s first chocolate maker.

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(L)RI: Who are we?

Keith Tucker (2013 lta ii), major in the Providence Police Department, has been named RI’s first casino operations and compliance manager. He will work for Lottery Director Gerald Aubin (’85).

Mayor Scott Avedisian (’97) of Warwick and Mayor Allan Fung (’01) of Cranston recently joined up to raise money for the annual Gasper Days celebration.

Hugo Figueroa (LCF) has been appointed to the Central Falls School Board.

LRI Executive Director Mike Ritz (’07) has been named to the RI. Historical Society Board of Trustees with votes to join Barry Hitman (11), board chair, and members Roger Begin (’87) and Barbara Hart (’11).

Paul Roberti (2013 lta ii) starred in an installment of “America’s Unearthed,” a series on The History Channel, broadcast last month.

The show featured the Narragansett R.I. Stone.

Mayor Angel Taveras (’98) grabbed the Grand Prize for Providence in the Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Mayors Challenge.

Four alumni and one current class member are working on projects funded through the R.I. Foundation’s “Make it Happen” campaign. They are Buy Local with Maria Tocco (’07); DesignxRI, Christine West (’10); Historic Tax Credit Advocacy, Scott Wolf (’87); Regulatory Reform, Leslie Taito (’06) and Urban Economic Development Planning, Lisa Ranglin (2013 lta ii).

Peter T. Giniat (’07), emergency preparedness director for Lifespan Health since 2007, was nominated to serve on the RIPTA Board by Gov. Lincoln Chafee. Mitch Edwards (’11) and Stephen Duval (’12) are new members of LRI’s Board of Governors.

Carol Hamilton (’11) is now senior vice president of Berkshire Bank. Though working in Massachusetts, she is keeping Rhode Island as her home.

Joseph P. Pratt (’06) is the new deputy treasurer/chief of administration in the State Treasurer’s office, where Ashley Gingerella O’Shea (CLI ’08) is associate director of communications.

Bob DiMuccio (’11), CEO of Amica, was recently interviewed on best practices in customer experience on Forbes.com.

Will Hill (2013 lta ii) has been promoted from major to Lt. Colonel, third in command of the R.I. State Police. First in command is Col. Steven O’Donnell (’04).

Rosamaria Amoros (’09) has been named the chief public affairs officer for the RI Department of Transportation.

Jen Shimkus (’07) is now vice president of the Board of Directors of the West Broadway Neighborhood Association. Rebecca Rosii Baruzzi (10) and John Tarraborelli (10) are now members of the board. Kari Lang (’97) is the executive director of the WBNA.

Terrence ‘Terry’ Gray, P.E. (’01) is now associate director for environmental protection for the state Department of Environmental Management.

Albert T. Klyberg, (’85), who served three decades as the director of the RI Historical Society, wrote an essay on “Revolutionary/Wartime Providence” for the city’s 375th Anniversary. To read the essay visit http://bit.ly/ essay275.

Richard Widdowson (’11) has left Rhode Island and CVS Caremark to become a vice president at JC Penney. Melissa Husband (’12) is now executive director of Community Action Partnership (formerly ProCAP).

Jesse Stoler, Esq. (’89) has joined the firm Holland and Knight LLP as partner.

Terry Dale (’87) signed a three-year contract extension as President of the U.S. Tour Operators Association.

Anne Kugler (’11) was at the White House recently to accept the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award from First Lady Michelle Obama on behalf of AS220 Youth. Anne serves as youth director.

Terry Gross (’03), executive director, and Nondas Vull (’85), board member, at the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence, accepted Excellence in Affordable Housing awards from the Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation. The institute was honored for “extraordinary work” guiding youth and families and “fostering a community where peace prevails.”

James Brayton Hall (’12) has been named deputy director of the Norton Museum of Art.

Steven Corrales, (LCF) was elected to the Central Falls City Council, filling the seat vacated by James Diossi (’12 and LCF) when he was elected mayor.

The Dorrance, owned by Michael Lester (2013 lta ii) and family, was recently listed among the top 100 U.S. restaurants by Opinionated About Dining.

Want to share some good news from the Best Class Ever? Email us at office@leadershipri.org.
UPCOMING EVENTS

April 19:
Leadership Chat with Commissioner Deborah Gist, 5-6pm, Gracie’s, Providence

April 23:
Rotunda Roundup with Common Cause RI, 2:50-5:30pm, Rhode Island State House, Providence

May 20:
Education Forum featuring Harvard Graduate School of Education Prof. Paul Reville and Rhode Island Education Commissioner Deborah Gist, 10:30am-12pm, Providence Journal Auditorium, Providence

May 22:
LRI Alumni Social, 5:30-7:30pm, NAIL Communications, Providence

June 12:
Iota II Appreciation Night (by invitation), AQUA at the Providence Marriott, Providence

July 14:
LRI Summer Series – PawSox vs. Rochester Red Wings, McCoy Stadium, Pawtucket

August 8:
2014 Kappa II Class Open House, 5-8pm, Location TBA

September 2:
2014 Kappa II Applications Due

For event details or to register, please visit lrievents.eventbrite.com.
Do you want to know what's going on? Send your email address to office@leadershipri.org to get on our email list, check LRI's very active Facebook page or join our Twitter feed.