



BUILD TOGETHER



Leadership
AURORA
CLASS OF
2025-26

INTRODUCTION

In 10 short months, Leadership Aurora class members experience an intensive mountain retreat, followed by monthly immersion in the best Aurora has to offer: medical facilities, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, police and fire facilities, the military, city management, and more. The class also selects, plans, and implements projects designed to give back to the community.

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce has supported the development of community leaders through the Leadership Aurora program for 42 years, and

while much has changed, the program continues to incorporate a laser focus on meeting the city's need for strong, skilled, and participatory leadership. The program is funded by The Chamber, in-kind donations, and class tuition. The Leadership Aurora Board steers the program, develops its curriculum, and oversees its success.

Ask a member of this year's class or a graduate of the program about their experience – you will be inspired!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Leadership Aurora class of 2026 acknowledges the many individuals and businesses that provide invaluable support to make this one of the most outstanding leadership programs in the United States.

Our appreciation goes to the guest speakers and personnel who took us behind the scenes of organizations throughout the city. Gratitude is also extended to the Leadership Aurora Board, Program Director Rene Simard, and the Aurora Chamber of Commerce – for collectively cultivating this top-notch program.

As we graduate, we look forward to meeting the individuals who will join us as Leadership Aurora alumni in the years ahead. Together, we will take Aurora confidently into the future.



CHAIR'S LETTER

To the Leadership Aurora Class of 2026...

I still remember the very beginning – meeting for the first time at Launch Pad Brewery, navigating those early moments of awkward small talk as strangers slowly became acquaintances. Soon after, we found ourselves together in Breckenridge, where I challenged you to invest fully in the experience ahead: to make connections, stay engaged, be present, and take full advantage of every opportunity this program would offer.

In just three short days, you selected your class president and began forming bonds that I believed would become something much more. As I got to know each of you, it was clear this class was going to do great things – and you delivered.

Leadership Aurora shaped my own journey and ignited a deeper passion for service. That passion for service was reflected in you throughout your year together – from donation drives to your meaningful class project. Your work at Seb's Recreation Center will leave a meaningful legacy, creating a more inclusive and welcoming space where individuals of all abilities can connect, grow, and thrive.



As these ten months have flown by, you leave with a deeper understanding of community and the impact you can have as leaders. You have built authentic relationships across industries and experiences, and my hope is that you continue to nurture those relationships and carry forward the purpose you discovered this year.

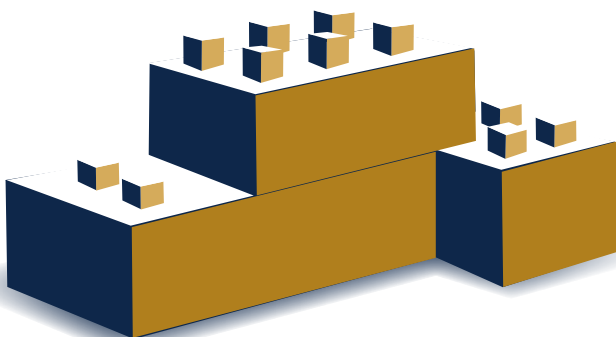
It has been a true privilege to serve as your Board Chair. I am incredibly proud of how you embraced the mission of Leadership Aurora and the difference you have made – not only in the community, but in each other. You leave with lifelong friends and a network that will support you well beyond this experience.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce for building and sustaining this exceptional program – especially Naomi Colwell, Rene Simard, the Chamber staff, the Leadership Aurora Board, and Vice Chair Michael Schaefer. Your dedication continues to make each class better than the last.

Class of 2026, your leadership and service brought my term as Board Chair to a truly special close. Thank you for an extraordinary year and for being an inspiring group of leaders.

With gratitude and pride,

Natalie Artibee
Leadership Aurora Board Chair
Class of 2017
Nelnet



LEADERSHIP AURORA BOARD

Mehran D. Ahmed
Vista Peak High School

Ryan Anderson
Adolfson & Peterson Construction

Natalie Artibee (Chair)
Nelnet

Joel M. Boyd
Mershops Town Center at Aurora

Cindy Camp
Aurora Police Department

Jordan Clark
Iron Sharp Foundation

Michelle Crawford
City of Aurora

Andrea Cregan
Advocates for Children

Joseph DeHerrera
Douglas County Human Services

Sarah Ellis
Retired/Past Board Chair

Ashley Gehrke (Class President)
Cherry Creek School District

Sarah Grobbel
Consultant

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Aurora Fire Rescue

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Danielle Jackman
University of Denver

Bob Jamieson
Retired/Past Board Chair

Bill Johnson
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Anne Keke (Secretary)
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Priscilla Sandoval
Home Mortgage Advisors

Michael Schaefer (Vice Chair)
Assembly Networks, LLC

Mary Sarah Schweiger
UMB Banks

Mark K. Smith
PhotoSmith Colorado

Courtney Swanson
Psychologist

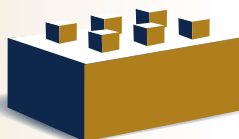
Ana Valles
Fitzsimons Credit Union

Lynne Winchell
Community College of Aurora

John Wolfkill (Past Chair)
Community College of Aurora
Foundation

Andréa Wright
State of Colorado

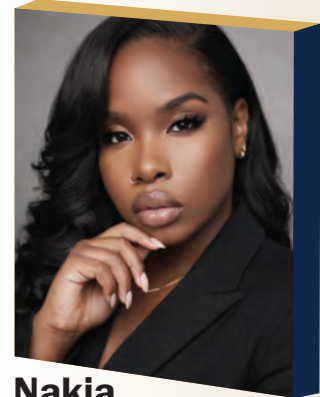
Mandy Young
Aurora Public Schools





**Ashley
Gehrke**

CLASS PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT



**Nakia
McCowan**

As we reflect on our journey as the Leadership Aurora Class of 2026, we are filled with gratitude for the experiences, growth, and connections we've shared together. What began as a group of individuals coming together at our fall retreat quickly transformed into something much more, including lasting friendships, a strong sense of community, and a shared commitment to making an impact in the city of Aurora.

From those early moments of getting to know one another, to the many conversations, collaborations, and laughs along the way, this class has built something truly special. Whether it was engaging in thoughtful discussions during our program days, learning about the inner workings and heartbeat of the City of Aurora, or expanding our awareness of the diverse communities we serve, each experience added depth to our journey.

Some of the most memorable moments were the ones in between, such as the social gatherings that strengthened our bonds and reminded us of the importance of connection. From our time together after Military Day in the Heritage Room to the many informal meetups, we found joy not just in learning, but in simply being together. These moments turned colleagues into friends and created a network of support that will extend far beyond this program.

Our collaboration on community initiatives, including our work at Seb's Recreation Center, demonstrated the power of collective action. We brought our unique perspectives, skills, and passions to the table, united by a shared purpose to give back and make a difference. Through this work, we saw firsthand what can be accomplished when people come together with intention and heart.

Leadership Aurora has not only deepened our understanding of this city but also created lasting memories and friendships. We leave this experience not just more informed, but more connected, inspired, and committed to leading with purpose.

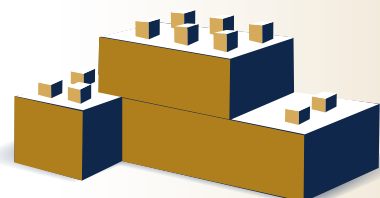
As we move forward, we carry with us the relationships we have built and the lessons we have learned. This class is a reminder that leadership is not a solo endeavor; it thrives in collaboration, connection, and community.

We are, and will always be, Better Together.



Ashley Gehrke
Class President

Nakia McCowan
Class Vice President



OPENING RETREAT

The drive to Beaver Run Resort in Breckenridge, Colorado, gave me time to think about how the retreat would play out. I imagined it be more of a classroom setting with a host of instructors lecturing to 32 strangers for the entire time of our stay. Fortunately, that was not the case at all,

We were still 32 strangers but somehow, we came together and selected a class president, vice president and chair and vice chairs of the many committees. When we were told that we were going to get all of those things accomplished during that short period of time, I had doubts, but we did it.

Having Franco Marini as our facilitator was very enlightening. He challenged us every step of the way with real life applications. We discussed our leadership styles and shared our knowledge of what works best for each of us. He also helped us understand the different personalities and how to work best with them.

My favorite part of the retreat was learning who matched the secret information about each other, and that is true, you can never tell a book by its cover.

— Adrian D. Morris



(Retreat group photo by PhotoSmith Colorado)



CLASS PROJECTS

Benjamin Franklin once said, “If you want something done, ask a busy person.” Well, that describes our Leadership Aurora Class (LA) of 2026 as we were busy tackling two local, non-profit projects: Seb’s Recreation Center (SRC) and The Village Institute.

Seb’s is a community-centered organization that empowers individuals with special needs, a concept formed between a son and his father. Sebian was born with muscular myopathy and desired a space where people with disabilities could belong. He envisioned a center with fitness, arts, media, gaming, and community. His father, Keithan Holiday, shared his vision and set out to make this dream a reality. Sadly, Sebian passed away at the age of 16, soon after SRC opened its doors. Today the center serves over 1,000 community members who have access to fitness equipment, wellness programs, inclusive activities, and events for people with disabilities, older adults, and their caregivers.

The Village Institute, like Seb’s, puts the “community” in community-based organization. Founded in 2020, their focus is on the needs of refugees, immigrants, and first-generation families. In a welcoming, two-story building, The Village Institute offers Montessori-style childcare for infants and toddlers, preschool programming, and programming that fosters leadership, positive mental health, and career development for young adults. It is run by a dedicated group of non-profit professionals, seasoned educators, and assisted by a dedicated network of volunteers, The Village team provides culturally competent care and training with more than 15 languages spoken by staff. They model the kind strength and innovation that comes from true diversity. The LA Class of 2026 set different but equally important goals for the two organizations. For The Village, we raised funds for the remodeling of their infant and toddler room and new landscaping for their pre-school program. For Seb’s, we remodeled and colorfully transformed the area to better accommodate client accessibility and increase storage.

At Seb’s, the work was divided into multiple phases. Walls and concrete floors in this 3,000 square-foot space got a fresh coat of paint using calming colors. We gutted and remodeled the kitchen, dramatically increasing its storage capacity and food preparation space. In the fitness area, we added rubber padding

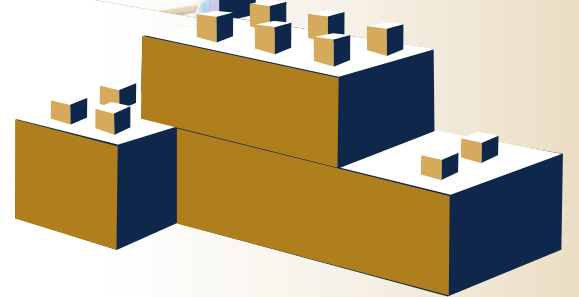
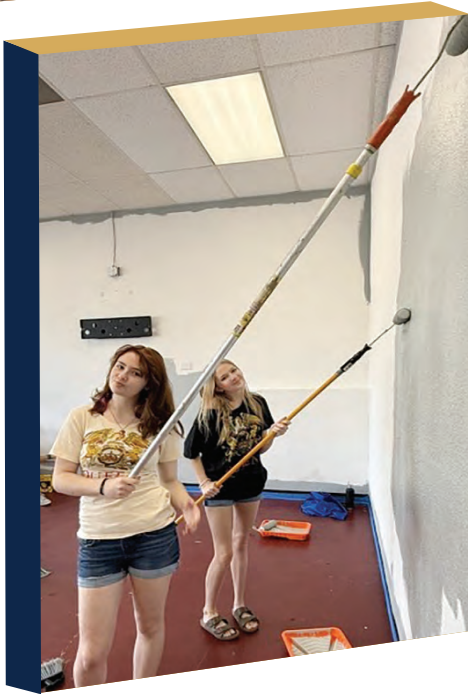
Seb’s Recreation Center (SRC) and The Village Institute

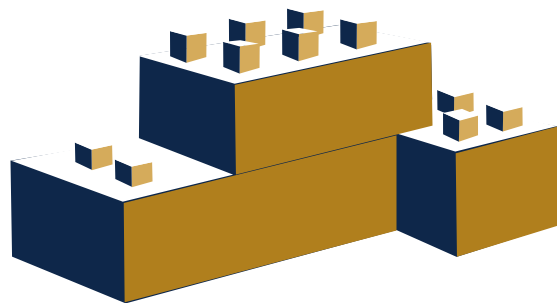
to completely cover the floors, making it more comfortable for people to move while exercising. Donations flowed in throughout the work, driving us forward to completing the project by graduation day. The company Elements provided ten, expensive, “flip-nest” tables for efficient conversions of the community room and classroom between learning and activity needs. Elements also donated their time to arrange a layout plan for furniture, and they discounted wall-mounted, acoustic tiles to absorb sounds from the arcade area. Bud’s Warehouse donated counters and cabinets that were custom assembled. Keithan, humbled by all our volunteering efforts, remained on site for each visit to help. He was effusive with gratitude and generous with food and fitness advice. As both a physical therapist and a fitness trainer, Keithan’s presence was a constant motivating force for our Class.

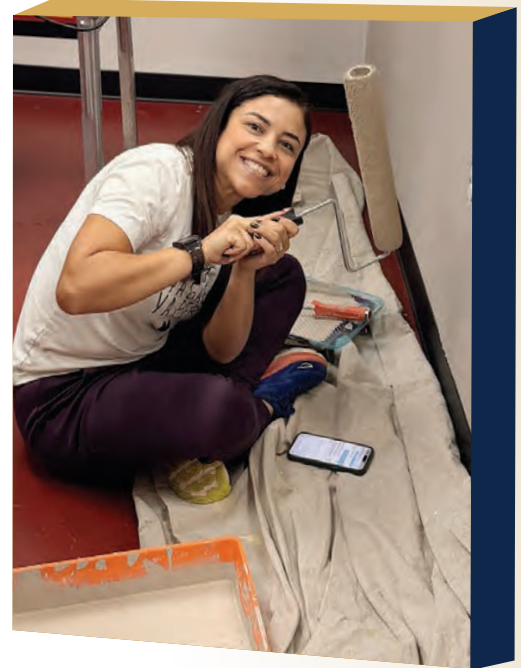
The many hours spent on these two projects made for a richly rewarding experience for everyone involved. Our efforts have made a lasting impact on the community, and we accomplished our goal of enriching the lives of others by the openness of our hearts and the generosity of our time. We are proud of our efforts and humbled to have been given the opportunity to serve through the Leadership Aurora program.

- Jan Boldt & Chris Tombari











**TARA
BELL**

*Cherry Creek
School District*



**NATHEN
BERRY**

Nelnet



**JAN
BOLDT**

*Advantage
Security, Inc*



**SARAH
BREMNER**

*CareerWise
Colorado*



**ESTHER
CLARK**

*Aurora Mental
Health & Recovery*



**ADRIANA
CORDOVA**

*Community
College of Aurora*

**STACEY
D'ANGELO**

*Community College
of Aurora*



**TIFFANY
ERSPAMER**

*Aurora Mental
Health & Recovery*



ASHLEY GEHRKE

*Cherry Creek
School District*

**JOE
HILL II**

Aurora Fire Rescue



**JORDAN
IVEY**

*Aurora Public Schools/
Vista Peak Prep*

**PENNY
KRUEGER**

*Aurora Chamber
of Commerce*





**JESS
LEITCH**

*Advocates for
Children CASA*



**MATT
LEWANDOWSKI**

*Adolfson & Peterson
Construction*



**CASEY
MCANDREW**

*Adams County
Health Department*



**NAKIA
MCCOWAN**

Benefits In Action



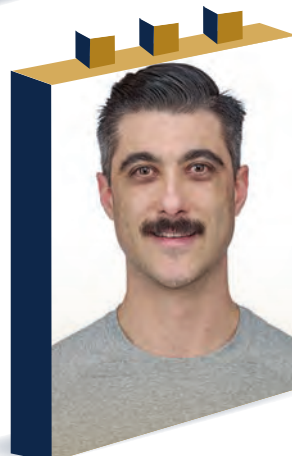
**ADRIAN
MORRIS**

City of Aurora



**DAVID
NEWSOM**

Nelnet



**ANDREW
ONKEN**

*Colorado Air
National Guard,
Buckley SFB*



**ERICK
ORTIZ**
*Aurora Police
Department*



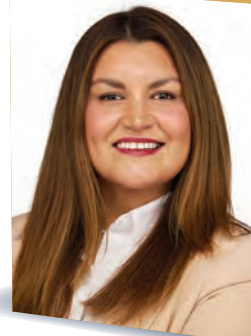
**MEGAN
QUINN**
UCHealth



**XIOMARA
SANCHEZ**
UCHealth



**DESIREE BANKA
ROTHENBERGER**
*Sunny Homes &
Associates, Inc.*



**MARIBEL
SANDOVAL**
Latinas 365



**KENDRA
SCHURICH**
*Aurora Public
Schools*



KRISTIN SMITH
*Downtown Aurora
Visual Arts*



CHRIS TOMBARI

*Community College
of Aurora*

**STEPHANIE
TACKETT**

Falck Rocky Mountain



**JENNIFER TORRES
TAMAYO**

First Bank



**MADISON
TURCU**

*Community College
of Aurora*



**EMILY
WILKINSON**

*HCA HealthONE
Spalding Rehabilitation*



**JACKIE
ZVEJNIEKS**

*Community College
of Aurora*



YEARBOOK COMMITTEE



Thanks to the Yearbook Committee!

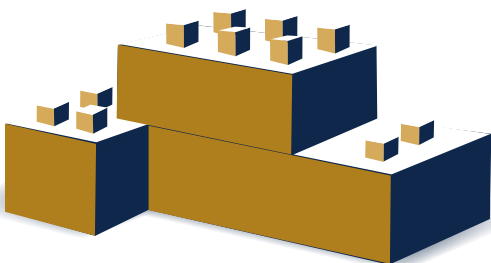
Left to Right: Joe Hill II, Stephanie Tackett, Nathen Berry, Penny Krueger, Adrian Morris, Jennifer Torres Tamayo, Jess Leitch, Adriana Cordova, Nakia McCowan, Chris Tombari, and Megan Quinn

Within a city so diverse – yes, Aurora by name –
Came a class bound for boldness, for purpose, not fame.
The Class of Twenty-Six, busy folks to be sure,
Added experience, boldness, and pizzazz to their lore
We explored the whole city – port to starboard, stem to stern
Oh, adventures to have! Oh the lessons to learn!

Our Aurora opened doors to the scenes-behind-scenes,
Where the workings go whirr and the missions find means.
To the speakers and hosts with their know-how and spark,
Thank you for the tours from dawn until dark.
To the Board, guiding steady through plans that are starred,
And our Program Director, the one – Rene Simard.
To the Chamber – Aurora! – with compass and course,
You've fueled this top-notch-y, can't-stop-it resource.

From first brick to last, our journey's complete,
We clicked into place with purpose replete
Better together, like unique LEGO pieces
A masterpiece built, yet our striving never ceases

— Chris Tombari



COMMUNITY DAY

Community day was our first Leadership Aurora session as a class, and the first time we were together since the retreat in Breckenridge. While getting reacquainted, we had the privilege of seeing a side of the city many of us had never seen before, making the day special for us.

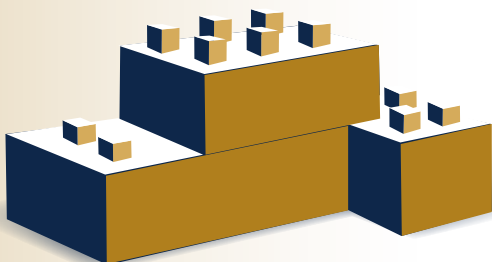
We started the day at People's Building and learned about the historic downtown Aurora art district. The class then split into five groups to carpool around the city; by dividing into smaller groups, we were able to see more nonprofits and learn about the amazing services they provide to the city of Aurora - 15 organizations in total! Each group interacted with the leaders of the nonprofits and learned about their mission and impact in Aurora.

Then the class made our way to the ABC collective for a tour and presentation by the founders, Dr. Janiece Mackey, Daniel

Sampson, and D.L Pos Ryant. The ABC collective was a moving and progressive center that focuses on giving kids in the neighborhood a safe place to be, like a woman's only room, a barbershop, and many more amazing opportunities for youth.

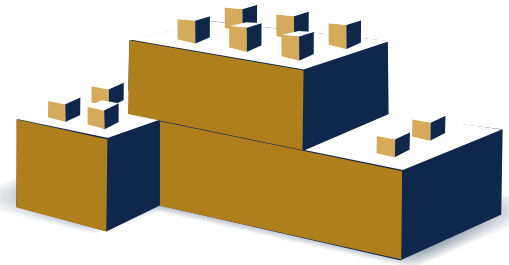
The class then went back to the People's Building to meet with our groups and share in teams what we had seen and learned at each of our nonprofits. This day was a favorite for many of the class members as it was a way to see the city we all love more closely than many of us ever had.

— Stephanie Tackett





CITY OF AURORA DAY

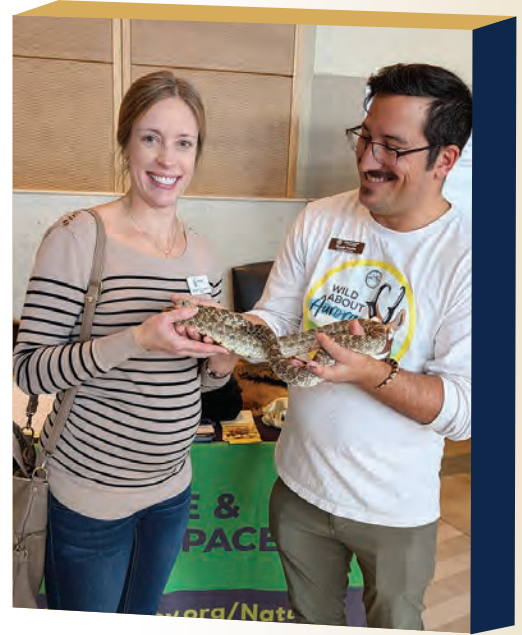


On this day, we learned about the city's priorities and how decisions are made by Aurora's leaders. We toured the historic Aurora Municipal Center and contributed to a mock city council session. We stepped into the roles of City Manager, City Attorney, Council Members, and community speakers, both in favor of and opposed to a proposed ordinance regarding the relocation of prairie dogs. Mock council members sat at the dais, participated in the roll call, and voted yay or nay after listening to the arguments. Others bravely volunteered to speak for or against the humane treatment and relocation of prairie dogs. In the end, our class voted against the relocation of prairie dogs. We ended the day with a visit to the Binney Water Purification

Facility, where we heard from experts on how Aurora's water is treated and purified before touring the facility. Overall, we saw Aurora in a whole new light and gained a new appreciation for the water we drink.

— Jess Leitch

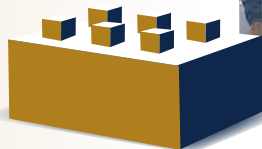


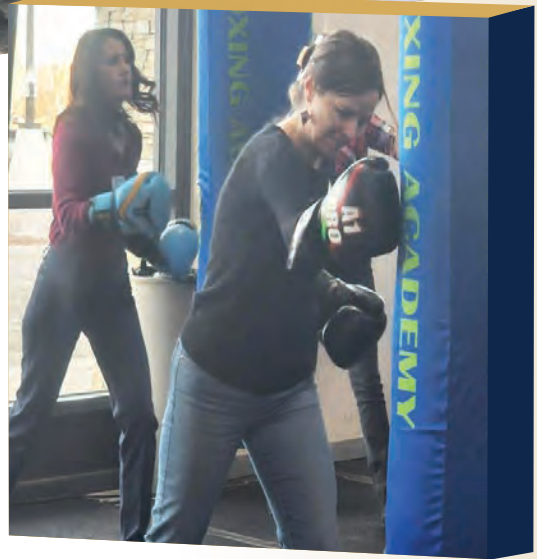
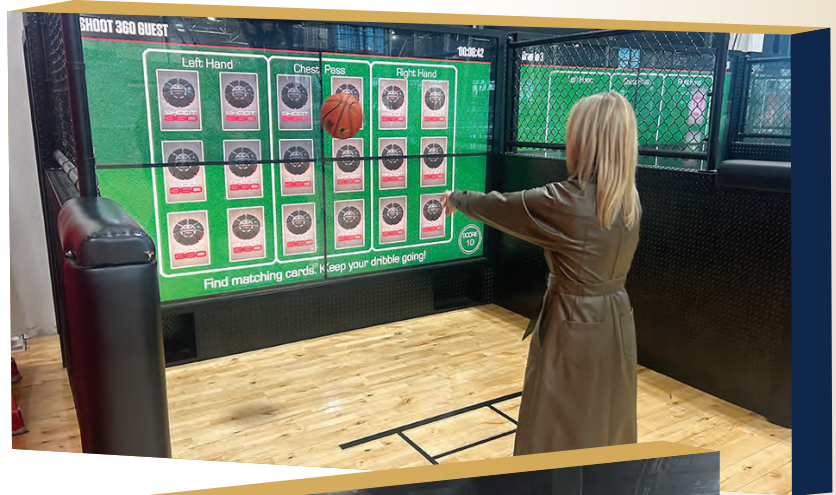
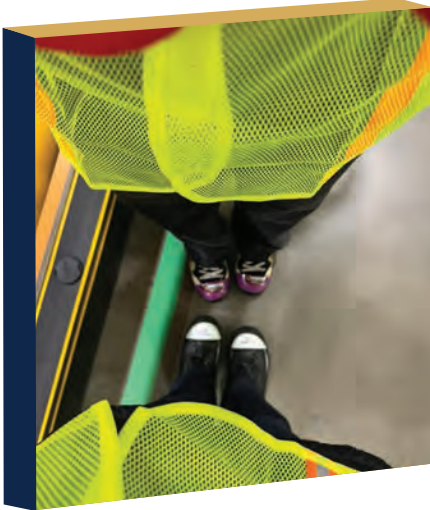


BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DAY

Our day started bright and early at Amazon's fulfillment center, listening to Sam Bailey and Tyler Curtis, who set the tone with stories about Amazon's impact on Colorado and the importance of economic development. The morning panel discussion brought together city leaders like Jacob Cox, Naomi Colwell, and Jonathan Woodward, who shared their perspectives on Aurora's growth, business climate, and how the city is working to attract new opportunities while keeping community needs front and center. Their insights sparked lively conversation and gave us a fresh appreciation for the teamwork behind Aurora's economic engine.

After covering our shoes with steel-toe covers, slipping on our safety vests, and splitting into groups, we toured the production floor of Amazon's massive distribution center. We received a firsthand look at the high-tech world of logistics and distribution. We started the tour like Amazon employees start their day – with some stretching. Then, we enjoyed a behind-the-scenes look at how packages eventually make their way to your doorstep (spoiler: it is a lot of automation, beeping forklifts, and human hustle).





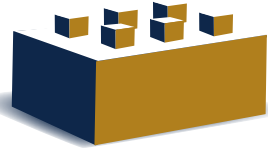
Next, we headed to the Mershops Town Center at Aurora for lunch (thanks, Peppino's Pizzeria!) and individual headshots (thanks, Mark Smith!), Joel Boyd and his team walked us through the mall's evolution, highlighting how it has become a hub for local business and community events. Staff from leasing, marketing, and operations joined in, making sure we saw the full picture. We also had a little time for some holiday shopping.

The afternoon was all about entrepreneurship and hands-on experiences. Nigel Hines from Local Love shared his journey from selling six pairs of shoes to building a business that gives back to Aurora's youth. His story was equal parts inspiring and practical, reminding us that local businesses are the heart of the community. Then, we got moving with interactive sessions at A1 Boxing and Shoot 360. Whether you were throwing punches or shooting hoops, it was a chance to step out of your comfort zone and connect with classmates in a whole new way.

We wrapped up with a tour of Colorado's Pro Gym and a happy hour at Scooters Bar & Grill, where the conversation flowed and new connections were made. The day was a perfect blend of learning, networking, and fun – showcasing Aurora's vibrant business landscape and the people who make it thrive. From robots and retail to entrepreneurship and athletics, we saw firsthand how collaboration and innovation are shaping the city's future.

— Nathen Berry

EDUCATION DAY



In January, the Leadership Aurora Class of 2026 went back to school for a day dedicated to exploring the innovative education systems preparing the next generation of scholars, workforce members, business owners, and community leaders!

Our day began at the Cherry Creek Schools Innovation Campus (CCIC), where culinary students welcomed us with southwest sunrise breakfast burritos and fresh fruit while we received an overview of the campus and its programs. CCIC offers students hands-on training and certification opportunities in fields such as computer science, aviation, health sciences, hospitality, construction, auto repair, and criminal justice. Following the presentation, we toured classrooms and observed students actively developing real-world skills that align with their career aspirations.

Next, we visited Vista Peak Preparatory (9–12) in Aurora Public Schools. After being introduced to the spirited “Bison Cheer,” the principal and a panel of teachers shared how Vista Peak prepares students for both college and career pathways. Through partnerships with local businesses and the Community College of Aurora (CCA), many students earn college

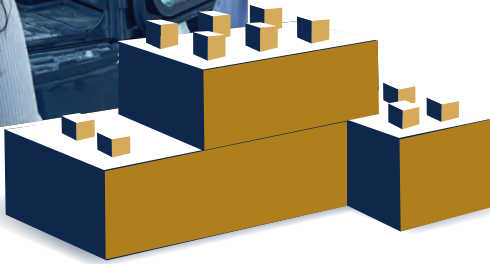
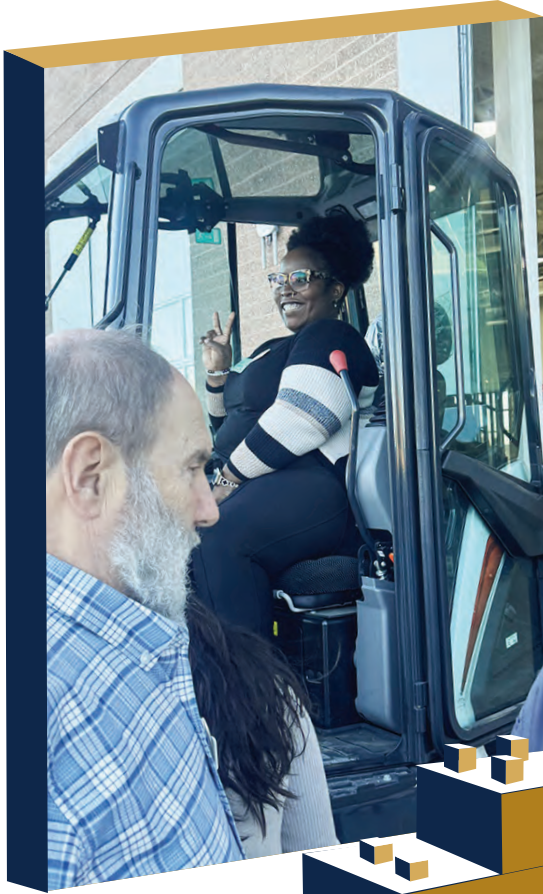
credits while still in high school, with some even graduating with associate degrees alongside their diplomas. Student Link Leaders guided us through the school, highlighting clubs, athletics, and programs designed to help students build community and discover their passions.

Our final stop was CCA's new Center for Applied Science & Technology, where we experienced hands-on learning firsthand. Class members participated in interactive activities, including a STEM engineering egg-drop challenge, a powerful performing arts presentation sharing students' real-life journeys, and a diesel power mechanics demonstration showcasing technical training in action.

Each stop along the way illustrated how education continues to evolve. Today's schools are not solely focused on traditional university pathways but are equipping students with practical skills, career certifications, and opportunities that empower them to succeed – no matter their background or chosen path.

— Chris Tombari and Nathen Berry





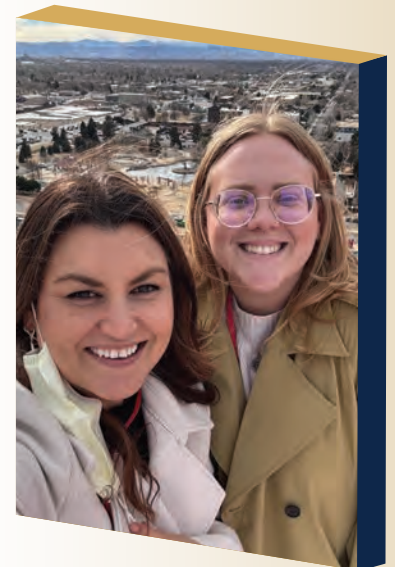
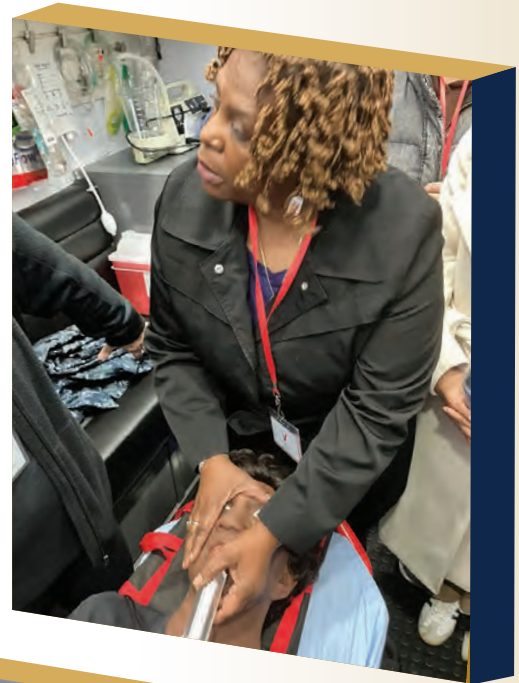
HEALTHCARE DAY

Genuine amazement was the feeling of the group as we explored the Anschutz Medical Campus. Presentations of the extraordinary work performed by our medical partners provided a clear understanding and appreciation for what Aurora has built to serve our community and beyond.

Our tour of Children's Hospital Colorado captured how this remarkable facility dedicates its work to caring for children. Quite the show-stealer during K-9 presentation was Galaxy, an employee who demanded that people pet her. Learning how these specially trained dogs connect with young patients was both heartwarming and impressive. Beyond bringing smiles, the K-9s play an important role in easing the anxiety that often accompanies a

difficult hospital visit. We were equally fascinated by the hospital's Gait Lab and the technology used to help children recover and regain mobility. Throughout the tour, it was impossible not to notice how thoughtfully designed the hospital is – bright, welcoming, and clearly built with children and families in mind.





The spinal cord injury and suicide in the Veteran population presentations were both deeply informative and emotionally impactful. We watched an inspiring video about a marathon runner whose motto, "Finish Strong," reflected the VA's commitment to helping veterans live full and meaningful lives after injury. We also saw incredible artwork created by a patient who now paints with his mouth after losing the use of his limbs, made possible through the phenomenal support of VA staff. Stories like these powerfully demonstrate the extraordinary care provided to the men and women who have given so much in service to our country.

At UCHealth, we learned about an innovative mobile medical unit while interacting with high-fidelity training mannequins used to simulate medical emergencies. Some members had a little too much fun discovering

that the mannequin's computer could produce very loud, life-like sounds of a patient in pain. Seeing the Life-Line helicopter and touring the Emergency Department further highlighted the remarkable preparation and coordination required to deliver rapid, lifesaving care.

We were all aware that Healthcare Day involved a lot of walking, the average step count: 7,600 per person. Not a shockingly high number, but it wasn't a day sitting at a desk, either. When you consider there were 32 people from Leadership Aurora who participated, the total number of steps for the group was 243,200. With an average of 2,000 steps per mile, Leadership Aurora Class of 2026 covered 121 miles collectively.

— Nakia McCowan and Chris Tombari

MILITARY DAY

Pride & Presence was our theme, and Military Day was another incredible experience for the Leadership Aurora Class of 2026!

Our day kicked off with a wonderful breakfast provided by the Colorado Air National Guard (COANG) at Buckley Space Force Base. We were treated to mission briefings from top commanders with COANG, Mission Delta 4, and Delta 2. During these briefings, we learned about the critical work happening on base, along with Buckley's rich history and evolution – from an Army Air Corps bombing range in the late 1930s, to Buckley Field named in honor of 1st Lt. John Harold Buckley of Longmont, who tragically lost his life in a mid-air collision during World War I, and finally to its current designation as Buckley SFB in June 2021.

From there, we boarded the bus and headed to the flightline to learn about the F-16s, which have been in use since the mid-1980s. Seeing these jets up close was fascinating, and we gained a deeper appreciation for the care and expertise required to keep them airborne in service of protecting our country. For one of our classmates, Nakia, the experience was especially meaningful – her grandfather was an Air Force pilot who flew F-16s, making the day both personal and moving. A few lucky members of our class even had the chance to watch the jets land following training maneuvers earlier in the day.

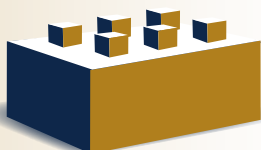
After lunch, we heard from a Joint Services Junior Enlisted Panel, where we gained first-hand insights into different military branches, why these service members chose to enlist, and the challenges they've faced along the way. Such poised, professional, and impressive young men and women.

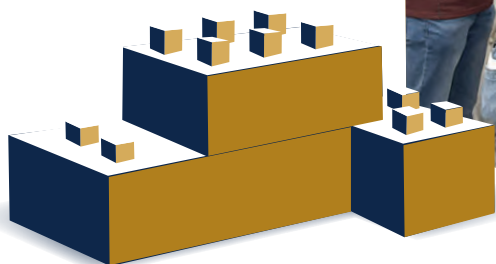
Then it was back on the bus to the Army Aviation Facility to see the Chinooks and Blackhawks – talk about impressive! We were truly like kids in a candy store: walking through the Chinook, climbing around the helicopters, snapping selfies, and listening to pilots good-naturedly debate which aircraft is the best. One was even hovering on the flightline—so cool to see!

We wrapped up our day with a visit to the 140th Heritage Room and time to reflect on all we experienced. What an incredible day – one that truly embodied Pride & Presence.

Better Together!

— Nakia McCowan and Penny Krueger





POLICE DAY



Police Day was an exciting, action-packed experience that gave class members an in-depth and behind-the-scenes look at the many facets of modern policing and the exceptional men and women who serve our community.

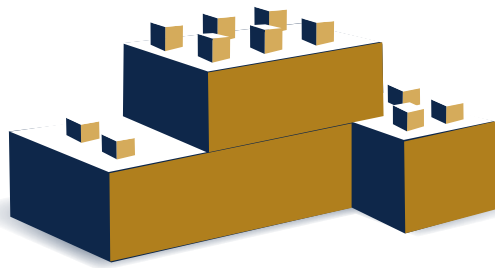
The day kicked off with opening remarks from Deputy Chief Chris Juul, who shared an overview of the Aurora Police Department, including current statistics, operational challenges, and the strategies being implemented to meet the evolving needs of the community. He also emphasized APD's strong commitment to accountability, officer wellness, and long-term sustainability, setting the tone for an informative and impactful day.

Class members learned about their Employee Support Unit and comprehensive wellness initiatives designed to support officers and their families. Sgt. Faith Goodrich led a thoughtful and inspiring discussion on Women in Policing, noting that women currently make up 11% of APD's sworn officers. She shared insight into recruitment, retention, and leadership opportunities, while highlighting the "30 by 30" initiative – an effort to increase female representation in policing to 30% by the year 2030. Kate Robinson followed with an overview of the vital role victim advocates play for both members of the public and officers, reinforcing APD's commitment to compassionate, victim-centered support services.

Training academy staff facilitated an interactive and thought-provoking discussion on reasonableness and the use of physical and deadly force. Class members then observed an arrest control demonstration that included a video showcasing APD's new Grappler Police Bumper – innovative technology designed to safely immobilize fleeing vehicles and reduce the need for high-risk pursuits.

During Precision Immobilization Technique (PIT) rotations, participants experienced the intensity firsthand by riding in both the "rabbit" vehicle being bumped and the pursuing police SUV.

The simulator session placed class members in real-time decision-making scenarios involving firearms and less-lethal munitions, offering a powerful glimpse into the split-second decisions officers must make every day.



The Aurora Police Firearms Training Center offered in-depth presentations on the SWAT Team and K-9 Unit. Class members learned how closely these elite units work together to ensure the safety of civilians — not only within the city of Aurora, but also throughout surrounding partner communities. Members shared insight into the extensive training, teamwork, and rapid decision-making required to operate effectively in unpredictable and often dangerous environments.

The K-9 Unit presentation showcased the critical role police canines play in public safety, from searching buildings and protecting officers to detecting narcotics and explosives. Currently, five APD canines are trained in narcotics detection, with a sixth specializing in explosives detection. Class members also learned about the rigorous selection and training process for K-9 handlers — open only to sworn officers — and the intensive 12-week training program completed by both handler and canine alongside the department's K-9 trainer.

Police Day was a powerful reminder of the professionalism, skill, and dedication of the Aurora Police Department and the tremendous responsibility carried by those who serve and protect our community every day.

— Megan Quinn & Penny Krueger

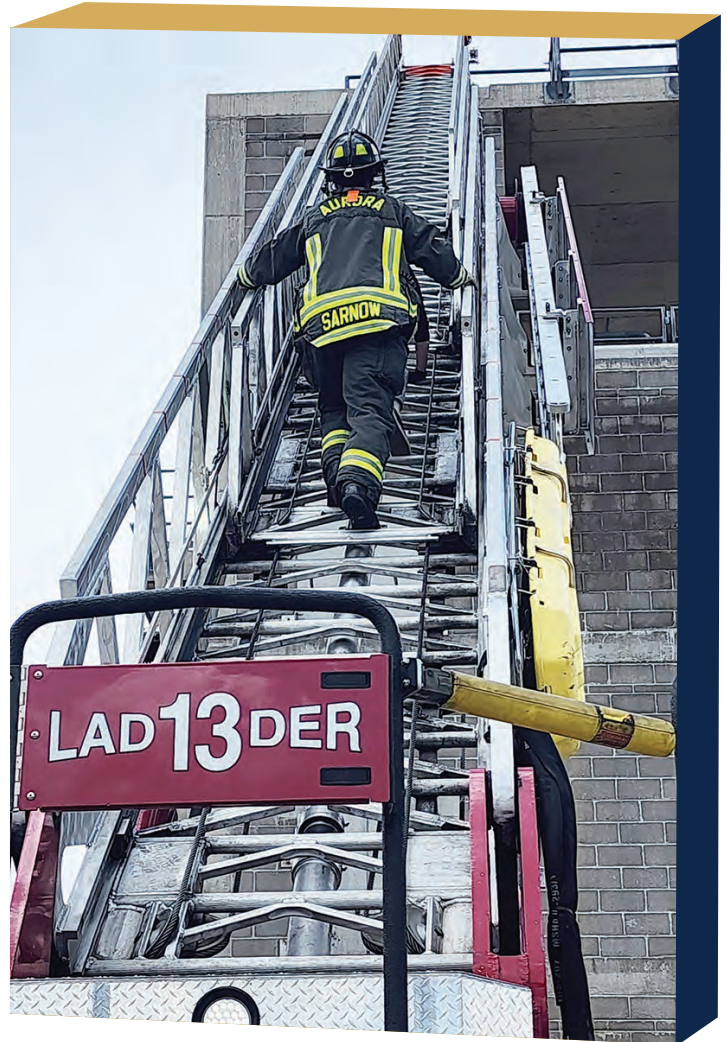


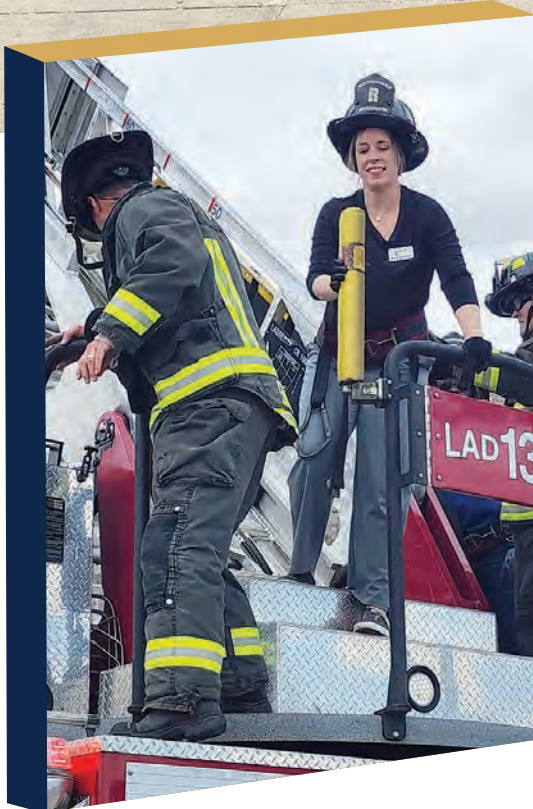
FIRE DAY

Aurora Fire Rescue (AFR) is an all-hazards department committed to protecting the residents and visitors of the City of Aurora. The department currently operates 17 fire stations strategically located throughout the city to provide quick and effective emergency response services. AFR serves the community with 17 fire engines, 6 ladder trucks, 4 Medical Service Units, and several supplemental resources that support specialized emergency situations. These resources allow the department to respond to a wide variety of emergencies, including fires, medical incidents, rescues, hazardous material situations, and natural disasters.

The City of Aurora is the 51st largest municipality in the US, with a population estimated at more than 414,000 residents. Due to the city's large population and continued growth, AFR plays a critical role in maintaining public safety and emergency preparedness. The department is recognized for its professionalism and high standards of service. Aurora maintains an "ISO Class 1" rating, which is the highest possible public protection classification a fire department can receive. This rating reflects the department's excellence in training, emergency communications, water supply, equipment, and response capabilities. In addition, AFR is a long-standing accredited agency through the Center for Public Safety Excellence, further demonstrating its commitment to continuous improvement and exceptional public service.

AFR also focuses on increasing diversity and representation within the fire service. Women currently make up approximately 6% of firefighters in Aurora, which is higher than the national average of about 4%. The department actively works to recruit more women into the profession and encourages young women to explore careers in emergency services. AFR has two female recruiters who regularly visit colleges associated with the National Center for Women & Information Technology and other educational programs. During these visits, they speak with students about the importance of teamwork, constant practice, education, and detection skills that are necessary in the fire service. Their outreach helps inspire future firefighters and creates opportunities for women interested in serving their communities.





In addition to emergency response, AFR works closely with schools throughout Aurora to provide safety education and community outreach programs. One important program the department supports is “Stop the Bleed,” a national campaign that teaches individuals how to control severe bleeding during emergencies until first responders arrive.

By partnering with local schools, AFR helps students, teachers, and staff develop life-saving skills and increase confidence during emergency situations. These educational efforts show that the department values prevention, preparedness, and community involvement just as much as emergency response.

Through strong leadership, advanced training, and community partnerships, AFR continues to provide high-quality service while setting a strong example for fire departments across the nation.

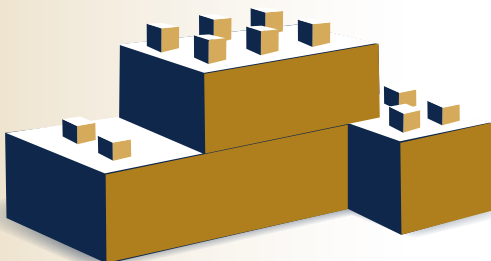
— Stephanie Tackett and Megan Quinn

SOCIAL AND HAVING FUN

Social time was extremely important to us, especially since we only met once a month. Everyone was very excited to see each other, “letting our hair down,” and decompressing after we finished the day of class. We could have a cold/warm beverage, grab a bite to eat, have some time to catch up with how each other is doing, all while making lifelong connections.

I know I sure did.

— Adrian Morris,
Chair of Social Committee



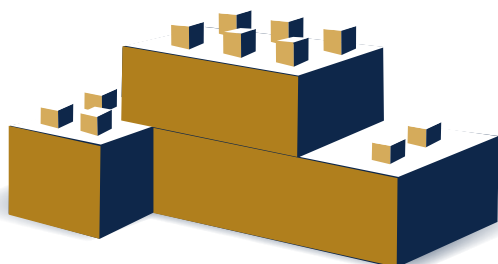
LEADERSHIP AURORA GOLF TOURNAMENT



The Leadership Aurora Golf Tournament has been a signature fundraising event of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce for 27 years. The monies raised from the tournament help support the Leadership Aurora program that annually introduces class members to a variety of information about, and resources for, the Aurora community. Because of generous sponsors of this Pay it Forward event, The Chamber can give financial assistance to incoming applicants, as well as fund the team building retreat that is so vital to the success of the program and its participants.

There are many ways to participate in the tournament, from volunteering to a variety of sponsorship options.

Contact Rene Simard for details, 303-365-4923 or rene.simard@aurorachamber.org



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Congratulations Jan Boldt Leadership Aurora Class of 2026!

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And congratulations to all 17 of the previous
Advantage Security graduates of the program:

Covin Picone (2025)

Mitch Stillman (2024); April Tate (2023);

Pete Torres (2022); Phillip Pacheco (2020);

Manny Arias (2019); James Rowley (2018);

Todd Sigler (2017); Noah Lawonn (2016);

Wayne Thompson (2014); Sandy Carter (2013);

Jeff Anderson (2012); Jeff Rauske (2011);

Jennifer Evans (2010); Christian Read (2009);

Ryan Evans (2007); Susan Johnston (2006);

Congratulations to Our **CCA LEADERS!**

Three exceptional CCA employees have completed the prestigious Leadership Aurora program—a 10-month journey focused on civic engagement and community leadership.

Please join us in celebrating:



ADRIANA CORDOVA

Executive Director of Advising and Transfer



STACEY D'ANGELO

Dean of Academic Success,
Office of Creative Enterprises



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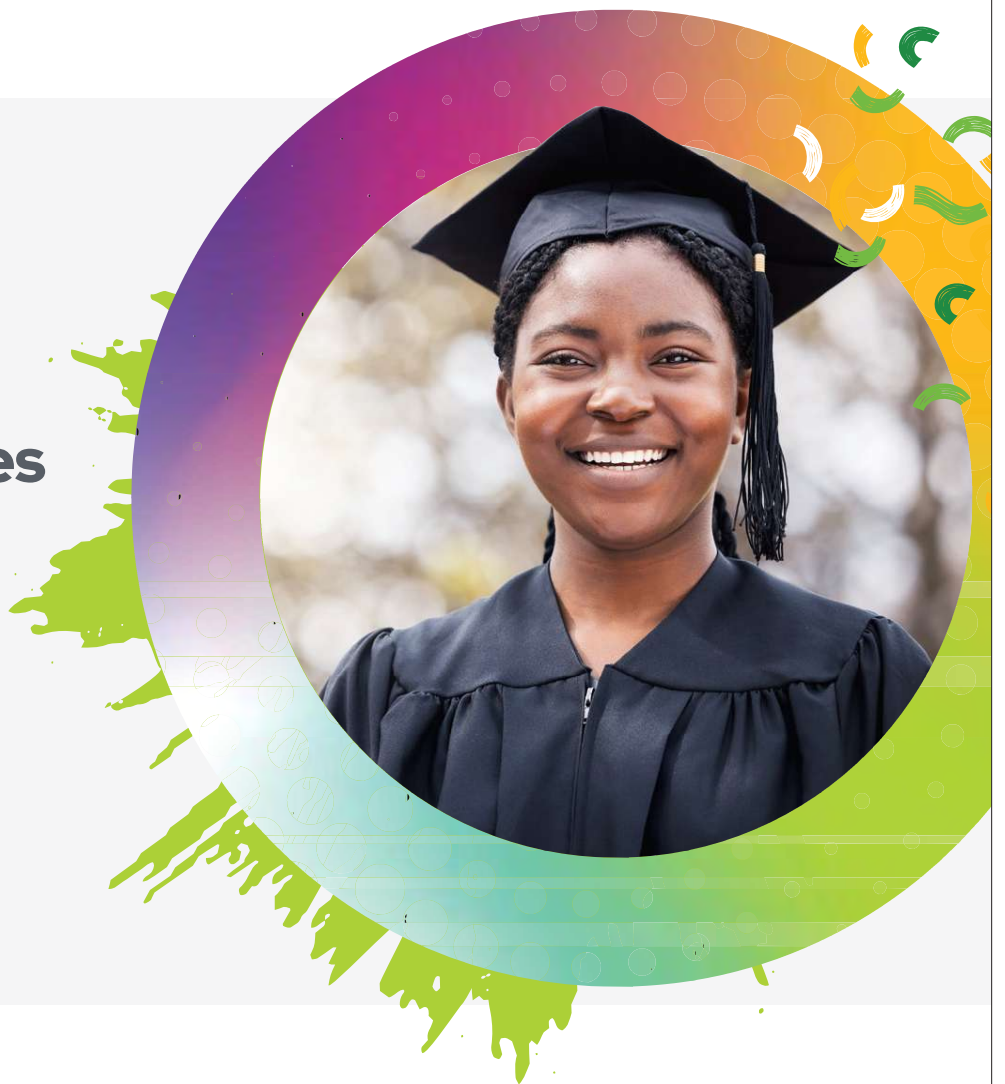


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a Crisis?

988

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Nelnet Congratulates the 2026 Leadership Aurora Graduates.



Leading with Purpose

Thank you to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the Leadership Aurora program for your continued success in developing engaged, informed community leaders. Your commitment to civic involvement, leadership development, and shaping Aurora's future is a powerful example of leadership in action.

A special congratulations to the Leadership Aurora Class of 2026 from all of us at Nelnet—your dedication to learning, connection, and service will help guide our community forward.

Learn more about us at NelnetCareers.com.



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