

**THE SUM OF US  
IS BRIGHTER THAN  
EACH OF US.**



**CLASS OF  
20-GR18!**



# RANKED AMONG THE BEST



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# 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 34 years, and while many things have 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 an alumni of the program about their experience – you will be inspired!

## Acknowledgements

The Leadership Aurora Class of 2018 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, Assistant Director Mitzi Schindler, 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.

Special thanks to The Summit Conference and Event Center for hosting Graduation, to Jim 'N Nick's BBQ for providing Graduation dinner, and to Barbara Peck for the class photo of the 2017-2018 Leadership Aurora class, taken at the Breckenridge, CO retreat, September 2017. (cover photo)





## Our Board **Chair**

Dear Class of 2017-18,

I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Leadership Aurora Class of 2018! When I met you in Breckenridge, I know that your class was not meant to be average. I felt then that the Class of 2017-18 will be extraordinary! You were destined to affect each other's lives and the community in a profound way.

It is my hope that you will continue the mission of Leadership Aurora. I am looking forward to seeing you continue to become the leaders, connectors and/or influencers actively engaging in positively shaping the future of Aurora. Your experiences in the last 10 months have created a bond that will forever connect you



with each other, the community and to Leadership Aurora.

Leadership Aurora is successful because of the special board of directors that I had the pleasure of working with. I have seen up close their dedication in ensuring that all sessions add value and meaning to your experience.

They made my role as Board Chair a lot easier and fun! I'm grateful for Sarah Ellis, Mo Barker, Christy Jones, Marissa Banker, Justin Clark, and Josh Hensley, who are leaving the board after their term ends in May. They will be missed.

My sincere gratitude to Rene Simard and Mitzi Schindler. They lead and manage all of us with

professionalism, attention to details, grace and sense of humor. Thank you to CEO Kevin Hougen and the Chamber Foundation whose vision and passion makes Leadership Aurora relevant and continues changing lives.

Thank you for the wonderful opportunity to be part of your Leadership Aurora experience. I ask you to be inspired by the late Mayor Steve Hogan who so graciously said when he was diagnosed with cancer, "I would ask that you take any concern or any angst and turn it to service – go do something great for Aurora!"

Best,

Gigi de Gala  
Leadership Aurora Board Chair  
2017-2018

## Our Class **President**

Thinking back on the past nine months, I am filled with a mix of emotions. First, I am honored to have worked alongside such a strong group of leaders. I have learned from each of you and am proud to call you friends. From the beginning, people began putting their skills to work, whether through skit writing/performing or catapult building – not to mention those impressive claims to fame! Who would have imagined the range of abilities and experiences within our class?

I am in awe of all that we have achieved. Back in September, a group of thirty-six strangers showed up in Breckenridge, and within minutes, it seems, we started finding similarities and building foundations for powerful relationships. Fast forward to now



and just think about what we have accomplished! We have made it to our graduation, and on our journey we have documented our progress in an exceptional way through class newsletters, pictures, videos, and this yearbook. We have raised money to support the incoming Leadership Aurora class. We have given back to our Aurora neighbors through

collection of coats, dress clothes, and books – just to name a few. We have worked to leave a legacy for our class by assisting essential community organizations through the Aurora launch of Purposity.

I am appreciative of the countless hours committed to our sessions, our project, and our class overall. While not all conversations were easy ones, I have no doubt that each perspective was well intentioned and coming from

a place of making the most of our experience and time together. When I think back to our Leadership Aurora experience, I will always smile when I think of the good times beginning with our retreat and continuing through each of the class socials.

In a way, these past nine months seemed to have flown by. I feel so fortunate to have been given the opportunity to get to know each of you and to learn about your contributions to our community in both professional and personal capacities. I look forward to our future connections as we continue focusing on best serving Aurora. Finally, I cannot wait to see you around town and celebrate the fact that we are, indeed, the best Leadership Aurora class ever!

Tricia Johnson  
2017-2018 Leadership Aurora  
Class President



# 2017-18

## Leadership Aurora Board



**Tyrone Adams**  
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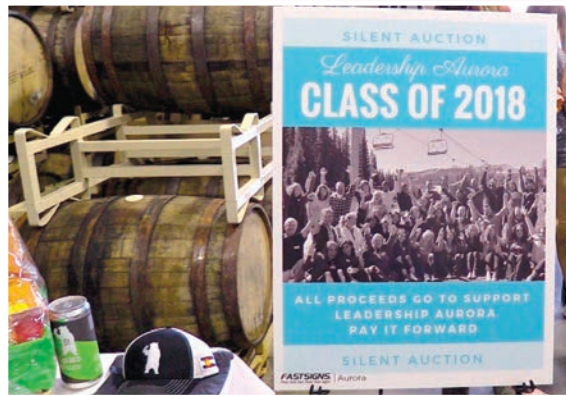


# ClassProject

For this year's class project, Leadership Aurora (LA) partnered with a 501(c)(3) called Purposity! Purposity is a non-profit that was borne out of the core belief that humanity finds purpose through generosity. Through text messaging and social media they connect people who want to help others with people in need within our community.

LA's mission was to launch Purposity in Aurora, allowing local, high-integrity, non-profits to benefit from Purposity's web platform of meeting needs. LA connected with Aurora Mental Health Center, Aurora Public Schools, and Arapahoe County Department of Human Services, Division of Adult and Child Protection and enabled them to be community partners of Purposity.

We had nearly 300 users register to support the effort and we raised just over \$10K. We celebrated with a launch party which was combined with our Pay It Forward event, and celebrated all that our class accomplished, while also hearing the non-profits share how meaningful their partnership with Purposity will be. We set out to provide our local community with something long-lasting, sustainable, and powerful that reflects the specific needs of Aurora, and we did just that!





# Class of 20GR18



## Edgar Acosta

140th Wing, Colorado Air National Guard  
edgar.b.acosta.mil@mail.mil

The comradery we achieved in such a short time within the Leadership Aurora program continues the established path of success for community members of the City of Aurora. The friendships and connections we have nurtured will benefit Aurora for decades to come.



## Lynette Adams

Community College of Aurora  
lynn.adams@ccaaurora.edu

I think my most memorable experience was connecting with the community and building friendships within my Leadership Aurora class!



## Raechel Anderson

Pickens Technical College  
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I value learning that every single one of my classmates truly cares from their hearts about the people in the community.



## Molli Barker

Juvenile Assessment Center  
mbarker@arapahoegov.com

As a new professional and resident in Aurora and in Colorado, Leadership Aurora opened my eyes to all that Aurora has to offer - and I know that I chose the right place to work and live!



## KalliBenson

Aurora Mental Health Center  
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I have been wanting to do Leadership Aurora for several years after a colleague of mine went through, and WOW – am I glad I did! It has been so amazing the experiences that we have had and I have so enjoyed learning about our incredible community and all that it has to offer. This has been the experience of a lifetime!



## JimBickford

Bickford Law  
jim@bickfordlegal.com

My favorite memory has to be the time Dave Strohfus stole the mic from a two-bit coffee-shop musician and threw down some Nathaniel Rateliff – he killed it!



## LindaBlackston

City of Aurora  
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"All your dreams comes can come true...  
if you have the courage to pursue them."

— Walt Disney



## SergeBorso

Nelnet  
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Leadership Aurora provided me with such a great opportunity to meet spectacular people and to learn about our community - while giving back.



## BethBraaten

Colorado Technical University  
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Perfection is good, but done is better.





## Leslie Brezina

Regis University  
lbrezina@regis.edu

My most memorable experience with Leadership Aurora were the Community Exploration activities. Visiting places like Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora Police/K-9/SWAT, Goodwill Career Connection Center, Community Crisis Connections, and the Delaney Farm historical site, have given me a rich background of the people living and working within the City of Aurora. None of this would have been possible without Leadership Aurora and my fellow classmates. Thank you for letting me be part of Leadership Aurora Class of 2018!



## Charmaine Brown

The Denver Foundation  
charmainekbrown@gmail.com

Meeting everyone at the pre-retreat reception was the start of something special. It was the moment I realized that this year was going to be amazing. The connections, friendships, and knowledge gained have truly been life changing, and I am encouraged and motivated by the great work being done in Aurora!



## Kimberly Brown

City of Aurora  
kdbrown@auroragov.org

Leadership Aurora has been such an amazing learning experience. It has opened my eyes to so many positive things about Aurora, as well as some of the challenges the community faces.



## Souleymane Camara

City of Aurora Veterans Commission  
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To me, the most memorable parts of being in Leadership Aurora are the platform it provided me to be a better informed member of the community, and the opportunity to learn and build long lasting relationships with some of my fellow classmates who see a bright future for Aurora – like I do.



## Julian Dewberry

Falck Rocky Mountain  
julian.dewberry@falck.com

I would have to say my favorite memory from the program was the night we all went out in Breckenridge. After a day and a half of getting to know each other, it felt like the first time we all let down our guard and enjoyed each other's company. Stories and experiences were shared, and I really got to know a lot of my classmates. The tone for the fun year we would collectively have took root there.



## Abby Fitch

City of Aurora  
afitch@auroragov.org

Leadership Aurora has given me roots in the Aurora community. Community Day opened my eyes to the needs of Aurora and taught me how to get involved with this dynamic and wonderful city! I will always treasure the time with my classmates.



## Sarah Grobbel

Cherry Creek School District  
sgrobbel@cherrycreekschools.org

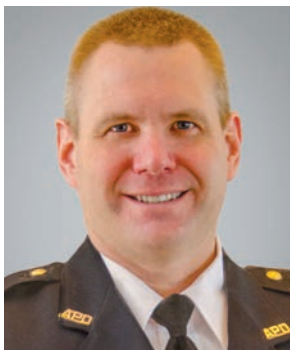
The best part about Leadership Aurora has been connecting with other people who live or work in Aurora and are committed to the success of this great city. It has been a blast, and I cannot believe that our time together as a class is coming to an end.



## Rachel Gruber

Aurora Chamber of Commerce  
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Every experience through Leadership Aurora has given me an additional appreciation and love for the city I live in. My most memorable experience was being able to shoot with the Aurora Police Department Swat Team. Not far behind that, was hearing David Strohfus sing karaoke at our retreat in Breckenridge.



## Mike Hanifin

Aurora Police Department – City of Aurora  
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Leadership Aurora has profoundly impacted my personal and professional life. I have experienced a new level of awareness and developed meaningful and purposeful connections to my classmates and the Aurora community in ways not imagined.





## Tricia Johnson

Community College of Aurora  
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"A high degree of empathy in a relationship is possibly the most potent factor in bringing about change and learning."

— Carl Rogers



## Natalie Kaiser

Aurora Mental Health Center  
nataliekaiser@aumhc.org

Leadership Aurora has been an incredible experience for me. One of my most memorable and impactful LA experiences was Media Day. I really understood the importance of being informed about what's happening in your community on a daily basis and the power of storytelling. Being able to watch a live news broadcast and practice being on camera was an absolute blast; I don't know if I'll ever have another opportunity like that!



## Mackenzie Khan

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"If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude."

— Maya Angelou



## Beth Klein

FirstBank  
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I was able to meet such a great group of people while getting to experience "insider views" of so many different aspects of Aurora.



## Susi Marlina

URS/AECOM  
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"Lead such a life that, when you die, the people may mourn you, and while you are alive they long for your company."

— Imam Ali



## Mary McClure

Aurora Mental Health Center  
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Leadership Aurora has been such an incredible experience, we have been afforded opportunities for learning, growth and connection to such amazing leaders in our community.



## Robert Mead

Grade Power Learning  
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“Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly, you are doing the impossible.”

— Francis of Assisi



## Melinda Robin

Aurora Mental Health Center  
mindyrobin@aumhc.org

This opportunity has not only expanded my knowledge, passion, and commitment to the Aurora community, but has also brought wonderful new relationships and partnerships into my personal and professional life.



## Rachel Robinson

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“The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today.”

— H. Jackson Brown Jr.





## James Rowley

Advantage Security, Inc.  
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"You are going to get knocked down, but you don't lie there.  
You get up and face the challenge."

— Ara Parseghian



## Tyler Sartorius

Adolfson & Peterson Construction  
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The Breckenridge class retreat was a blast! My most memorable experience was the group project during the retreat and getting to know other classmates better during the dinners and happy hours!



## Michael Schaefer

The Summit Event Center  
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"The problem with being a leader is that you're never  
sure if you're being followed or chased."

— Claire A. Murray



## Deborah Sherman-Hoefler

Community College of Aurora  
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I waited 10 years to be able to participate in Leadership Aurora and I am so very thankful to be a part of the best class ever! My passion for the city of Aurora has deepened by seeing the town from the heartbeat not just the surface. Thank you to the Community College of Aurora for sponsoring me and giving me the freedom to learn more about the city we serve!



## Colin Spencer

Colin Spencer Productions  
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Leadership Aurora was about meeting the most incredible people!



## David Strohfus

Cherry Creek School District  
dstrohfus@cherrycreekschools.org

Leadership Aurora not only gave me the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of what it takes for a diverse city thrive, it also presented me with the gift of wonderful connections with my great classmates, who serve every facet of our community!



## Emily Trujillo

The Medical Center of Aurora  
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“When you change the way you look at things,  
the things you look at change.”

— Wayne Dyer



## Yvonne Valdez

Citywide Banks  
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The people I have met, the organizations I have visited, and the adventures I have experienced in the past year, are memories I will always cherish.



## Jacob Zolna

Wagner Equipment  
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“Our greatest glory is not in never falling,  
but in rising every time we fall.”

— Confucius





# Opening Retreat

The Leadership Aurora Class of 2018 kicked off our 10 month adventure together with a class retreat in Breckenridge. We spent two days learning about expectations and objectives around Leadership Aurora and had fun while teambuilding and bonding. We quickly realized that we would become the best Leadership Aurora class ever with dynamic professionals from a variety of industries, all bringing tremendous contributions to the table. Our class retreat enabled us to generate momentum and move our work forward in powerful ways to positively impact the great city of Aurora.



Leadership Aurora Class of 20GR18  
(Photos by Barbara Peck)







# COMMUNITY DAY

Leadership Aurora's first gathering was an eye-opening experience that introduced the class to several organizations in Aurora. We broke up into groups visiting several organizations that included everything from the Community Colfax Network to the Adams County Workforce. We not only learned about the organizations' missions, but listened to the needs and how Leadership Aurora might be able to help. When we reconvened at Gateway High School, we participated in a poverty simulation, where participants were split into families and had to solve real-world difficulties. The activity was humbling. As the first session, this day was eye-opening. Many organizations are doing wonderful work, but there are also many unmet needs. It really taught us how Leadership Aurora can make a difference.



# CITY OF AURORA DAY



Aurora Day was focused on learning about the city, its government, and its economy. We started the day at the Aurora Municipal Center, home to the City of Aurora government. We heard from the Interim City Manager Jason Batchelor, who explained Aurora's form of government, the Council/Manager form of Government. The Budget Manager then talked about the finances of the City - where your tax dollars are spent! Mayor Steve Hogan graciously took time from his busy day to speak with the class about the roles of the Mayor and City Council, and how Aurora's elected officials are unique in that we have a full-time mayor and part-time council members. We then participated in a mock city council meeting during which we learned Council's role in transportation policy. We then heard from the Small Business Development Center.



After learning about City government, we traveled to Stanley Marketplace, where we got a tour and spoke to Mark Shaker, the mastermind behind the Marketplace. We got the opportunity to speak to the business owners, learned about small businesses and their challenges and opportunities. We finished with a social at Stanley Beer Hall, supporting local business and enjoying each other's company.

# MEDIA DAY

To kick-off Media Day, we got on a bus and took a field trip to Fox31/CW2, where we were given a tour and run down from Channel 2 anchor Mike Landess. We were even given the opportunity to watch a live broadcast! After our tour, we headed back to the Aurora Municipal Center, where we learned about Aurora's very own Channel 8. We then got to "produce" our own news show! We rotated between working in the control room, running the cameras, and participating in on-camera interviews! When we wrapped up that activity, we heard from Jamie Alvarez with GBSM about communicating and messaging with the media. This presentation was very informative and provided information that is sure to help us throughout our careers.







## EDUCATION DAY

On Education Day, we were grateful to meet with the Superintendents from Aurora Public Schools (APS) and the Cherry Creek School District (CCSD), which collectively serve more than 96,000 students. APS educates children speaking more than 160 languages from over 130 countries, while students in CCSD speak more than 130 languages from over 100 countries. While there may be some unique differences between the two districts, there are definitely shared goals for educating today's learners. Both APS and CCSD have championed programming to establish workforce readiness.

We also met with the President of the Community College of Aurora as well as with leaders from Colorado Technical University, and the Colorado Film School. The educational opportunities that exist in Aurora are extremely diverse and astounding!



## MILITARY DAY

We were honored to meet with Leadership from the local military community at Buckley Air Force Base. Having an opportunity to tour the Base is something that many people don't get to experience. From touring the "Golf Balls" of the 460th Space Wing to the F-16s of the Colorado Air National Guard and various aircraft of the Colorado Army National Guard, it was a day that we will not soon forget.

There are thousands of people working on Buckley (military members, contractors and civilians) who call Aurora home. These are people who are woven into the fabric of what makes Aurora great!



## HEALTHCARE DAY

On Healthcare Day, we were very fortunate to meet with healthcare experts from The Medical Center of Aurora, UCHealth, Tri-County Health Department, Spalding Rehabilitation Hospital, Kaiser Permanente, and Children's Hospital Colorado. We were afforded the opportunity to tour many of the facilities and be hands-on with some of the latest advances in modern medicine.

Aurora boasts some of the newest and best medical facilities in the Midwest. The outstanding, professional staffs at each of the facilities were very welcoming and took the time to answer our questions.







# POLICE DAY

Police Day was a great day to get hands-on experience of a day in the life of the amazing men and women who protect our community. The Aurora Police Department (APD) has been recognized as a leader in emergency response, use of technology to enhance training, and officer performance and wellbeing.

While it was exhilarating to have the opportunity to shoot a rifle and witness a K9 takedown, it was also a day to reflect on the sacrifices the men and women in uniform make to protect the City of Aurora.



# FIRE DAY

Our mini-fire academy provided us an insider's view into the workings of the Aurora Fire Department. It was an informative and interactive day that gave us the chance to put out a kitchen fire, see in a dark house with thermal imaging, tear off a car door with the jaws-of-life, and even ride 100 feet up in a fire engine bucket. It was a tremendous opportunity to experience first-hand what it takes to be an emergency responder.





# Social & Having Fun



**The Aurora Police Department and  
Volunteers in Policing (VIPs) -  
Congratulates Leadership Aurora  
Graduates on your special day!**

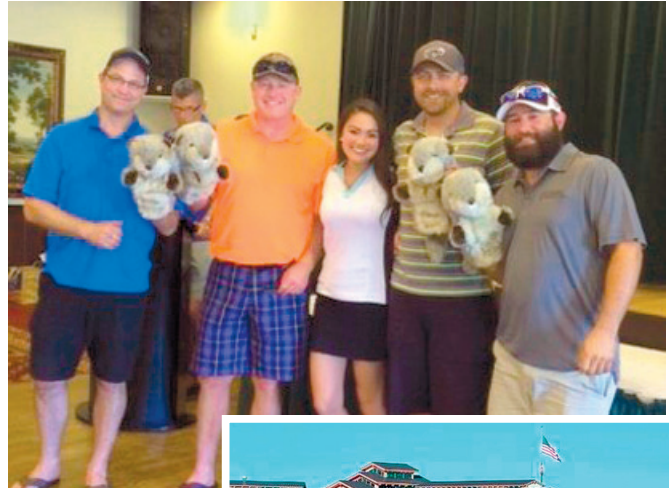
The Aurora Police Department always welcomes citizens who are interested in volunteering and strengthening the bond between police and the community. If interested in volunteering, please contact the APD Volunteer Coordinator at 303-739-6346 or email [ajacson@auroragov.org](mailto:ajacson@auroragov.org)



# Leadership Aurora **Golf Tournament**

The Leadership Aurora Golf Tournament has been a signature fundraising event of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce for 20 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 is able to 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.

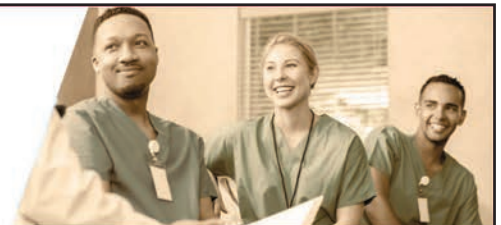
There are many ways to participate in the tournament, from volunteering to a variety of sponsorship options. Contact Rene Simard for details, 303-365-4923 or [rene.simard@aurorachamber.org](mailto:rene.simard@aurorachamber.org)



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A photograph of three graduates in graduation gowns. In the foreground, a young Black woman with curly hair is smiling broadly. Behind her, a young man with a beard and a young woman with glasses are also smiling. They are all wearing dark blue graduation gowns with white stoles.

## Nelnet Congratulates the 2018 Leadership Aurora Graduates.

### Celebrating Diversity in Aurora

Thank you to Leadership Aurora for emphasizing community engagement, celebrating the diverse community, and creating dedicated, passionate leaders of tomorrow.

Congratulations to the Leadership Aurora Class of 2018! We look forward to seeing what you continue to accomplish in the Aurora community.

Learn more about us at [NelnetCareers.com](https://www.nelnetcareers.com).



# Congratulations

  
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or flowcharts. It is about one life  
influencing another." – John C. Maxwell*

## Leadership Aurora Class of 2018

*Congratulations*

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## Congratulations! Leadership Aurora Class of 2018



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[djbarber@djbarber.realtor](mailto:djbarber@djbarber.realtor)



## *Congratulations to the Leadership Aurora Class of 2018!*

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