

OPINION

THE OBSERVER'S EDITORIALS

GARDEN OF LEADIN'

Leadership institute is a welcome addition

Sometimes, when things governmental are looking bleak, we find ourselves wishing we had a leadership garden, where we could go to harvest more and better help for our government and community programs. Plant some seeds, cultivate them carefully, and then transplant fresh leadership to take this community to new heights.

We weren't alone in that fantasy, and a first-of-its-kind collaboration will begin plowing that garden next month.

The new Institute for Community Leadership combines the resources of Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville Technical Community College, Methodist College, the Cumberland County School System, Cumberland County and the city of Fayetteville. The program defines itself as "a recruitment and training program for grassroots leaders."

With startup funding from the Cumberland Community Foundation, the institute will choose its first class in July and begin classes in September. The group — 40 in all — will be selected by the sponsoring institutions. The group will meet one evening a month, from September to April. Veteran professor and politician Suzan Cheek is the institute's executive director.

The institute isn't necessarily designed to

produce candidates for elective office, although that could happen, Cheek says. There are "nearly 300 boards and commissions active in Cumberland County," she said, "and about a thousand nonprofits in the county," although many of them are small. But all of them need volunteer board members, and training them is the institute's mission.

The classes will introduce the 40 students to members of existing boards and help them better understand how those institutions operate. Most important, it will school them in what it takes to be a community leader. And the process won't end in April — the institute will continue to mentor the graduates, helping to match them up with good opportunities in community service.

The collaboration of so many important community institutions is good news of itself. That kind of cooperative effort is bound to create community synergies unlike any we've yet seen. The institute has great potential as a community problem-solver, as well as a leadership trainer.

The garden is plowed, and the seedlings are coming along soon. We're excited about the crop. We expect it'll be a beauty.

(Anyone seeking more information about the institute can check out its Web site at www.leadership4us.org, or call Suzan Cheek at 910-584-0487.)