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**[www.ccmbdc.org](http://www.ccmbdc.org)**

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**CELA Leadership Salutes 2022 Graduates**

While embracing the premise that leadership and learning are indispensable to each other, the Cleveland Emerging Leaders Academy (CELA) held its third graduation ceremony for a new cohort of emerging leaders on November 17, 2022. The event was held at the Deerbrook Country Club in Shelby, NC. In keeping with its mission to develop a cadre of informed public servants from the minority and underserved communities, CELA welcomed six (6) new graduates, who successfully completed a community leadership program designed to equip participants for leadership service and growth. Class III participants included Janee Boykins, Tara Hawk, Shermunda Ross, Phyllis Toms, Zakiyah Toms and Shaletta Wilson.

The occasion was highlighted with special recognitions, reflections and remarks from Gina Carter, Executive Director of Child Care Connections and Dr. Forrest Toms, co-founder, and CEO of NCREG, LLC. Following special presentations, and class reflections, a Charge was given to the class by Dr. Karen Williams, Director, Behavior Health Services, Cleveland Co Family YMCA.

Founded in 2017, The Cleveland Emerging Leaders Academy (CELA) is a community-based leadership program designed to prepare promising leaders for community service through a process of strength-based leadership, knowledge building, rigorous reflections, experiential exercises, and intentional participation in public meetings, and community projects. Moreover, the objective is to also build leadership capacity by developing a cadre of informed, socially conscious, and transformative leaders from underserved communities who provide a deeper commitment to public service and leadership engagement. According to the co-founder and Executive Director, of the Cleveland County Business Development Center (CCBDC), "the primary goal of CELA is to intentionally seek out and identify a younger generation of promising leaders who have the "will" and desire to improve the quality of life for everyone in the community".

Cleveland County has a long history of minority leaders who have served and enriched their communities as elected officials, humanitarians, volunteers, community, and faith leaders, says



Hooker. The Cleveland Emerging Leaders Academy is designed to identify and prepare the next generation of aspiring leaders to serve on community and civic boards and committees to ensure equitable representation of the issues and concerns within the community they serve.

The Cleveland County Business Development Center (CCBDC) is also serving as an incubator for talent development to support and aid the evolution of the next generation of civic and community leaders. "We certainly have had a rich history of community engagement over the years," says Hooker.

This year's class proved to be another resilient group of aspiring leaders who were intent on building on the legacy talent identification, talent development, and talent utilization to help move this community forward, noted Dr. Toms.

For more information on CELA, CCBDC, program sponsorships, events, or business services, you can contact the office at 704/482-2232, or 704/692-7840.

*Members of the Cleveland Emerging Leaders Academy (CELA).*

**#1 Picture**

*Phyllis Toms*

*Tara Hawk*

*Janee Boykins*

*Shaletta Wilson*

*Zakiyah Toms*

*(not pictured – Shermunda Ross)*

**#2 Picture**

*Richard Hooker*

*Robert Miller*

*Phyllis Toms*

*Keeynan Pharr*

*Tara Hawk*

*Dr. Forrest Toms*

*Janee Boykins*

*Dr. Karen Williams*

*Shaletta Wilson*

*Zakiyah Toms*

*Jeff Ross*

*Felicia Degree*