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## Citizens' Academy to be formed in Winter Haven

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WINTER HAVEN - Winter Haven officials are making good on their promise to be more open and accessible to the public by forming a Citizens' Academy.

"The academy has been developed to educate and inform the public on the process of their city government," said Deric Feacher, assistant to the city manager. "We anticipate it will increase the enjoyment of citizens who will learn how the day-to-day operations take place."

Details of the academy will be presented to the City Commission during its meeting at 7:30 p.m. Monday at City Hall, 451 Third St., N.W.

The six-week program will include six two-hour sessions, each featuring a tour of specific city facilities and presentations by key city personnel. Discussion topics will include current and future projects, the overall goals of the city, and overviews on the operations of various parts of the city. Refreshments will be served.

"Participants will have access to department directors and front line staff in every department," Feacher said.

Academy participants will receive an academy book and materials, a graduation certificate and a city lapel pin. The classes and materials are free.

According to Donna Sheehan, the city's communications and marketing director, the first session will be held Aug. 5 through Sept. 9, with a graduation presentation and reception Sept. 13. If approved by the commission, the academy will be offered quarterly.

"We want the community to be informed on how the city works and how we serve the community," said Sheehan, who developed the program.

Sheehan said similar programs have been successfully offered by Lakeland and the county in the past.

"We are proud of what we do and it is nice to share that with people who are interested," she added.

Feacher said City Commissioner Steven Hunnicutt recently jump-started the Citizens' Academy, for which Sheehan had laid the groundwork about two years ago.

Hunnicutt said he encouraged city officials to offer the Citizens' Academy after attending Florida League of Cities events and learning about similar programs held in other municipalities.

"Basically, (city officials) are going to move the residents through an orientation program like they do new commissioners," he said. "Participants will walk out and

have a totally different perspective when things are done.”

Hunnicut, whose campaign platform last fall included supporting increased public access and input into city hall, believes the Citizens' Academy is a good way to involve the community in city government.

“This will give citizens in the community an opportunity to understand how City Hall works,” Hunnicutt said.

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