

# WEDGWORTH LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

for Agriculture & Natural Resources

class X newsletter

Seminar X  
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# Let's Reflect.

## Director's Dialogue -Dr. Hannah Carter, Program Director



**“Life begins at the end of your comfort zone”**

is one of my all-time favorite quotes. If we have done our job—this program will take you out of your comfort zone. Just letting go of control and following my agendas is uncomfortable for some! And just when you get comfortable with leadership program planning...you come to the end of our “domestic” seminars and only have the international trip ahead of you.

Our tenth seminar occurred in the latter part of April. I also call it my “potpourri” seminar as it is a medley of topics—preparing for the international trip, leadership learning and unique to Class X—a whiffle ball tournament. We will get to that in a minute...



We began the seminar with a discussion on improving personal productivity—it was a thought provoking session on how to spend our time. I think it was a good topic to begin with as one of the big things about being in this program are the opportunities participants will have to put their leadership to work—and how do you make decisions on where to spend your time and energy?

Dr. CC Suarez brought to the class the idea of “The Danger of a Single Story”—which I believe was helpful as we begin thinking about our international trip. There are a lot of apprehensions about going to Africa because of what we hear in the news, which is mostly negative. But there are so many stories about Africa that are positive—and we will have our own after the trip. After Dr. Suarez, we got a semester’s worth of Scottish history from Dr. Harland-Jacobs!

One of the industries we had not discussed yet in this class is the Florida Solar Industry. With the help of Wes Wheeler (Class V) the class learned a great deal more about the industry and even got to look at one of the largest solar arrays in Gainesville. Thank you to Wes for setting up a great evening of solar programming!

Mark Greeff (Class VI) shared his own stories about Africa and set the stage for what the group will experience during their time in southern Africa. We are grateful to Mark for making the trip to Gainesville to tell his own story about Africa. Story telling has been a common thread during this class and we were pleased to have Jaron Jones and Brandon Telg come back for one more session on telling our industry’s story.

Wednesday night was one of those nights of programming that I will never forget. Gale and Dottie Trotter wanted to host the class this final night—and host us they did! They found Belle Oaks Barn in Brooker—the perfect event space for our evening! One of the requirements was to have a field large enough for the first ever WLI Whiffle Ball Tournament. It was so much fun to watch the comradery among the class as they played—all in their green team jerseys! Dottie prepared a traditional Scottish meal for dinner and the surprise of the evening was a bag piper to begin dinner! We cannot thank Gale and Dottie enough for the memories they created on Wednesday night for the group!

Thursday was another “first” for the

program as we have never spent any time in the north east part of the state. With that we began our day with Danny Johns (Class IX) at Blue Sky Farms learning about the potato industry. From there, we went to Tater Farms Turfgrass and spent time with Eric Hjort (Class VII) and learned about the sod industry. Eric and Polly Johns gave us a history of the farm and provided us lunch as well. This was special for me as Polly and Frank Johns (Class I) were some of the first alumni I ever met as a grad student—and Frank had bought seed potatoes from my Grandfather—that’s why I love agriculture as we are all connected!

From Tater Farms, we headed to Volusia County (the Fern Capital of the World) and learned about the fern and cut foliage industry from David Register (Class IX). We ended the day discussing

agri-tourism with Steve and Kelly Crump (Class III). All in all, it was a great day of touring and learning about all these unique industries!

One of the other great features of this seminar was the addition of Amanda Ball. Amanda is the new director of the New Mexico Ag Leadership Program and she wanted to be able to see how it’s all done—I think she left after our seminar with a lot of information on

programming and a lot of new friends! We grew our network too and look forward to seeing great things happening in New Mexico!

One seminar left. 17 days in Swaziland (newly renamed The Kingdom of eSwatini) and Scotland. This has been an amazing class and I know they will be a wonderful addition to our alumni association! Please plan to join us for graduation on Thursday, July 26th and the alumni meeting the 27th and 28th!

“ This has been an amazing class and I know they will be a wonderful addition to our alumni association!”



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# Meet

## Class X Member John Bertram



John Bertram is Vice President of Business Analysis for Lykes Bros. Inc. and has been with the company for almost 20 years in a diversity of roles. He enjoys combining the strategic, operational and financial aspects of the ag business and the ability to be both analytical and creative in this role. John has a B.A. from the University of Florida and a M.B.A. from the University of South Florida. He has been happily married to Isabel for 17 years and is the very proud father of Sydney (14) and John Jr (12). The Bertram gang lives in Lutz with their dog Bella and we love the Tampa area (except for the traffic).

## Preparing for the Journey Ahead

-John Bertram



### Seminar X of Class X began in familiar Gainesville territory

on the North Lawn of Ben Hill Griffin Stadium. As we gathered for our final seminar on U.S. soil, the conversations were familiar, yet somewhat different this time. While we did the usual catching up on work and family news, there was also plenty of conversation about the inevitable winding down of our time together as a Wedgworth cohort. As always, it was great to see everyone again, but there was a definite air of finality beginning to settle over the group vibe.

But not so fast my friends... we still had Seminar X, packed with international trip planning, interesting tours and speakers, as well as our much anticipated wiffle ball tourney in the immediate days ahead! We finished up our coffee and munched down on some amazing Straughn Farm blueberries as we crossed University Avenue and entered Emerson Alumni Hall for our first seminar of the week.

Following tradition, we began with announcements from the class. Martin Hackney was recently elected Secretary of FNGLA and will be in line for the Presidency in three years.



Congratulations Martin, your leadership will be a great asset to FNGLA. Kevin Wright has transitioned from Generation Farms to Oak River Farms to focus on the company's real estate investments. Well done Kevin! Lastly, Dr. Carter is a nominee for the Educator of the Year Award. We look forward to Hannah being recognized for her hard work, dedication and being a great leader of leaders. A well-deserved honor, Class X could not be prouder!

Class announcements are always one of my favorite parts of each seminar, allowing everyone to get the latest scoop on the personal and professional accomplishments, and challenges, of fellow classmates. Sharing these stories is an important part of the group dynamic.

Jim Lilkendey of Apogee Coaching was our first speaker of the day. Jim talked with us about improving personal productivity in our hectic lives. Would anyone support a constitutional amendment to change this ridiculous 24-hour rotation of the earth rule? How about 28 or 30 hours in a day? Maybe John Morgan could jump in and help with that! Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Lilkendey was here to help us figure things out. This was a helpful



session, with great interaction among the group. Jim provided us with some tools and a roadmap to improving our situations in the rat race of daily life. We talked about life energy and controlling the amount of energy we allocate to tasks on a personal level. To improve focus on a specific task, we must train, pushing the limit of mental exhaustion in terms of intensity and endurance, then follow with rest and replenishment, much like an athlete would train his or her body. This makes great sense to me and is something I'll be putting into practice. Jim implored us to always be mindful and "invest wisely", because how we spend our energy is how we spend our lives. Full of useful tips, practical advice, and some good book recommendations, this session was a great example of time wisely invested. Thanks Hannah for hearing the cries for help and getting this topic on our agenda.

Next up was a much-anticipated discussion of



our upcoming international trip to eSwatini (fka, Swaziland) and Scotland. Aside from the unexciting (but necessary) details of traveling with a group of 30+, such as health records, passports, travel itineraries, etc, Hannah finally divulged some of the highlights for our 16-day journey. In Swaziland, we will be meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, as they are very interested in starting an ag leadership program in this country. It will be an honor to meet the Minister, and perhaps have some small input in the establishment of the future "SLIANR". We also will have an opportunity to discuss some important agricultural topics as our issues groups will lead conversations with local farmers. On Friday we will travel to Kruger National Park, which I know is highly anticipated by everyone in the group. I've been preparing by watching lots of bloody predator vs prey videos on the Battle at Kruger channel on YouTube. I hope we get to witness some of the "BIG 5"! (more on that later). On Sunday,



Our next order of business was a touch of Scottish history, cultural nationalism and Brexit. Dr. Jessica Harland-Jacobs provided us with a thorough understanding of all things Scottish, including geography, politics, the economy, kilts and tartans. Distinctions between the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands were pointed out. Surprisingly, the Highlands have closer ties to English culture than do the Lowlands (the Glasgow-Edinburg area where we'll be visiting). I felt like I was back in Turlington Hall circa 1992 for my Wednesday morning European History class...only this time I didn't fall asleep, but instead felt thoroughly prepared to hit the streets of Edinburg with confidence. I think Mike Basore is extremely excited about this leg of our trip. Me too Mike.

After another brief session on international trip planning, it was off to Depot Park for dinner and a discussion of the solar business with Wes Wheeler (Class V) and Hoch Shitama of Akira Wood. Wes and Hoch led an in-depth conversation on the opportunities available in residential and commercial solar arrays. There was a lot of good Q&A, as we got pretty heavy into the economics of solar investments. The takeaway for me was, there is power in numbers. Meaning, combined purchase power can create economies of scale for homeowners, allowing them to install solar systems at a lower cost and enjoy a higher return on investment. Wes is a leader in this effort, as evidenced by the Gainesville Residential Solar Co-op being ranked among the largest & most successful in the country.

Tuesday evening brought the usual group gatherings and plans for our night in Gainesville. After a long day, it was nice to relax with friends and enjoy some good conversation.



we fly to Scotland to begin our week in the Glasgow-Edinburg area. I'm curious about the ag industry in Scotland and admittedly don't know a whole lot about it. In my mind, I'm expecting a good dose of sheep, whiskey and unicorns! Stay tuned...

After lunch (Firehouse subs, woo-hoo!), we welcomed Dr. CC Suarez whose topic was "Effective Communication in the Global Context". What a great subject to cover before heading out across the pond, many of us to visit countries and cultures we've never experienced before. Dr. Suarez led us through a couple of interesting exercises designed to strengthen our communication skills and overcome barriers to communication (like language). For me, the most important thing is don't be afraid to try. Often a good faith effort at communicating (even if a dismal failure) is appreciated and will get conversations started. If all else fails, lots of smiles and sharing of good food also help to smooth out the communication rough patches!

We then watched the Ted Talk "Danger of A Single Story". This was about a middle-class woman from Nigeria and her experience being stereotyped, and her admission that she herself had been guilty of stereotyping others. A very eye-opening lesson to be learned. It will be important to expand our minds and not be restricted by the single story of any one people or country during our international experience.



“It is amazing how many words for conflict exist in our language...why? Because conflict is such a big part of our lives.”



Wednesday morning began with a drive deep into the pines at Austin Carey. After arriving, we all passed around and signed ~30 picture frames for our class photo. I gotta say, we were pretty darn efficient!

After finishing our chores, Jon Dain joined us for some new ways to think about conflict resolution, including some practical tools and solutions. It is amazing how many words for conflict exist in our language...why? Because conflict is such a big part of our lives.

Several break-out group activities forced us to think about conflict situations in our personal or professional lives and how different people might deal with similar situations. Everyone is different. Every conflict is unique. Every person's idea about resolving conflict is their own. No wonder there's some much conflict in the world. The triangle of needs and interests was great guide to understanding the differences in people and understanding their "why". Finally, in the "Drama By the River", Luther was obviously to blame as the source of this wretched conflict, while Abigail's Mom did nothing (wrong).



Mark Greef (Class VI) of Driscoll's joined us next for an incredible slide show journey titled "My Homeland and the Future of Agriculture in Africa and Beyond". Mark grew up in George, South Africa and shared his unique insight with us on the culture and country that he loves, as well as a broader view of the African continent. Mark provided so much good information, too much to cover here, so here are a few highlights:

- Conservation of natural resources is common practice in S Africa, and is not politicized like in the U.S.
- Swaziland is a good case study for the challenges faced in many African countries
- Kruger National Park covers ~ 2 million hectares (about the equivalent of the entire country of Wales or Israel)
- The Big Five are: Leopard, Buffalo, Elephant, Lion, Rhino (I hope we get to see them all)
- Mark and his family have a great story, and he does a great job telling it.

Thanks Mark.



# A Class X Night to Remember

-Valerie McKee

On the evening of April 25th, Class X was able to experience a night they shall never forget! In the middle of a jam-packed programming schedule, Class X was able to gather at the beautiful venue of Belle Oaks Barn in Brooker, FL to play the most intense whiffle ball tournament ever. What could POSSIBLY top off such an incredible evening? Bagpipes, of course!

Mrs. Gale Trotter and Ms. Dottie Trotter prepared the grandest Swaziland-and-Scotland-inspired dinner! Many alumni were in attendance for the dinner, including Mr. Wes Wheeler (Class V), Mr. Reggie Brown (Class I), Mr. Scott Emerson (Class III), Mr. David and Mrs. Angela Pope (Class I), and Mrs. Brittany Lee (Class IX). We cannot thank the Trotters enough for sponsoring such an incredible event!





# Meet

## Class X Member Holly Chamberlain



Holly's passion for agriculture stems from her upbringing on a dairy farm and Christmas tree farm in Belvidere, NJ. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resource Management and a Bachelor of Science in Plant Science; she completed a Master of Science at Penn State University in Plant Pathology. She started her business, Pest & Disease Management, LLC in 2007. Holly was recently employed with International Farming Corporation, LLC as Regional Agronomy Director and FL Model Farm Manager.

### **Purple Potatoes, Green Grass,** and Plenty of Gratitude!

*-Holly Chamberlain*



The day was filled with the shared experience and kindness of Wedgworth Leadership alumni opening doors for Class X! Thanks to the many good graces of several WLI alum, we had an educational day touring agricultural operations from Hastings to Seville to DeLeon Springs.





The seminar kicked off with a great stop at Blue Sky Potato Farm with Mr. Danny Johns. Mr. Johns shared his story with passion and enthusiasm for bridging farm operations with government regulation, consumers with production and being a great agricultural ambassador. It was an honor and pleasure to meet with Mr. Johns and tour his fields and facility.

“It was an honor and pleasure to meet with Mr. Johns and tour his fields and facility.”



After visiting with Blue Sky, the group traveled to Tater Farms to visit with Eric Hjort, WLI Class V11. We toured the well-maintained sod operations from production to harvest. The group also visited the future site of an exciting new citrus grove under construction. Water management, ever present as a concern on the farm, was discussed regarding linear irrigation operations for efficiency and best farm management practices. We had the privilege of seeing mechanical sod harvesting in action. Many thanks to Mr. Hjort for the wonderful barbeque and fellowship with Tater Farms and Wedgeworth alum on the farm.

We had the opportunity to tour the FernTrust operation in Seville with Mr. David Register, Class IX. It was a highlight to see an inside view of how the floral industry grows, packages and sells greenery for bouquets and arrangements. From greenery packaging to fern production, the challenges of production in Florida resonate within the group concerned for weather, markets, and labor availability.

Many thanks to Mr. Steve Crump, WLI Class III, for the opportunity to visit the



Vo-LaSalle Family Farm in DeLeon Springs. It was exciting to see the passion they have for their farm, community and business. It requires true dedication and commitment to marry agricultural business with tourism.

It is with the utmost appreciation that I would like to express gratitude on behalf of Class X for the experience and opportunity to visit fellow WLI alum and tour their respective operations. The seminar tied together underlying themes that are always addressed as the agriculture sector continues to evolve in Florida: water management, regulation, consumer – producer perceptions, labor availability, and changing markets. Many thanks to Valerie, Hannah, Joe and all of the WLI that made this seminar a truly wonderful experience.

# “A Cup of Joe” with Dr. Joe



Inspirational  
Reading Reviews from **Dr. Joe Joyce,**  
Program Faculty Advisor

## “Uncommon Friends: *Life with Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Alexis Carrel, and Charles Lindberg*” by James Newton

Did you ever acquire a book and set it on the shelf and not pick it up again for years? Well that is the case with this one. I was given this book in 2003 by a Leadership Florida classmate (Class XXII). I picked it up a few weeks ago, dusted it off, and could not put it down. We all think we know a lot about these five men, but the insights provided by James Newton, who was close friends and confidant to all five, reveal things I'm sure most people do not know or appreciate. It is also a window into their souls, provides a glimpse into their leadership characteristics, and what made them the world changers each represents. They each provided tools which have shaped out civilization.

First a note about the author, James Newton. He maintained a life long friendship with each – a friendship that began when he was only 20 years old and head of development of Edison Park in Fort Myers (across the street from Edison's home). He also was in line to head the Firestone corporation before he left to pursue his global spiritual mission.

Maybe the best way to provide an overview of this story is to discuss each man separately:

“The secret of staying afloat is to create something that people will pay for. I didn't work at inventions unless I saw a market demand for them. I wasn't interested in making money as much as in being the first to invent something society needed.”

Thomas Edison – He never gave up and always credited his failures for his future successes. In fact, he had hundreds of failed light bulbs before he perfected the light bulb we know today. He also invented the movie picture, the recorder (in spite of the fact that he was deaf most of his life), tires for Firestone and improvements for Henry Ford's Model T and Model A, and even the carbon transmitter that made the Bell telephone a practical invention. His credo was “The secret of staying afloat is to create something that people will pay for. I didn't work at inventions unless I saw a market demand for them. I wasn't interested in making money as much as in being the first to invent something society needed.” He had 1093 patents credited to his name. That's 10-12 for every day of his adult life.

Henry Ford – The Edison's were next door neighbors to the Fords in Ft. Myers. Their friendship was so deep that Ford's gift to Edison was the first Model T, the first Model A, the first V8, and the first Lincoln off the assembly line. Ford credited Edison as being the inspiration to his success. Ford was a man of many first like the V8 engine, but his true strength was

his leadership. Newton quoted him , “the easiest way is to follow the crowd and hope to make money. But that is not the way of sound business. The way is to provide a service. Try to run a business solely to make money and the business will die.” In 1914, he doubled his workers wages to \$5/day to the consternation of his industrial colleagues and bankers. He did it for two simple reasons – a higher wage drew a more productive worker and it was no good mass-producing a cheap auto if there weren’t masses of workers and farmers who could afford it.

Harvey Firestone – Firestone was also a neighbor of the Fords and Edisons. He hired the author James (Jimmie) Newton as “Assistant to the President” to manage the real estate procurement involved in the expansion of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company nationwide. He became the closest confidant and like a son to Firestone. Firestone had a genius for choosing the right person for the right job. Firestone said: “I have learned not to bring in men at the executive level however impressive their credentials. I try to keep my eye on them as they prove themselves at lower levels.... My most valuable executives have picked themselves by their records.” Firestone met Ford when he was developing the model T and convinced him to use pneumatic tires rather than solid rubber. Thus, their lifelong business and personal relationship.

Alexis Carrel – Most people have never heard of the French physician, Dr. Carrel, the man who during WW-I developed the technique still used today of suturing torn blood vessels back together and was thus credited with thus saving thousands of lives. He was also the pioneer who developed, along with Charles Lindberg, the perfusion pump which allow him to keep an organ alive outside the body without it becoming infected. This initial work evolved into the heart-lung bypass and the transplanting of organs. Carrel was also a deeply spiritual man whose central philosophical convection was, “ man needs to conform to the laws of nature, but also seek ways to know the will of God. Modern surgery and medicine is really just learning how to work with the natural processes of the body.”

Charles Lindberg – We all know of Lindberg as the aviation pioneer who was the first to fly across the Atlantic, but Lindberg was a mechanical genius who was sought out by

“I have learned not to bring in men at the executive level however impressive their credentials. I try to keep my eye on them as they prove themselves at lower levels.... My most valuable executives have picked themselves by their records.”

corporations and governments worldwide. His work with Carrel is one example. Like Edison he tried endless experiments over five years before he perfected the all-glass percussion pump for Carrel. Lindberg was a tireless isolationist prior to WW-II, but once the US entered the war (even though he had resigned his commission) he worked tireless to enhance our aviation technology and tactics. He is credited with trading fighter pilots on techniques to extend the fuel range of their fighters to attack Japanese positions which were felt out of range. In his later years Lindberg also became very spiritual about man’s place in the world, he stated to Newton, “our pride in our mastery of the Earth need the humbling perspective that the wildness of nature brings to us. Our future depends on our ability to combine the knowledge of science with the wisdom of wildness.”

This is a quick read of 357 pages. I found it fascinating account of how these six men interacted and changed civilization and history. I hope this brief review will prompt you to pick it up and not let it sit on your shelf for 15 years!!!



# *A Word* from our new friend Amanda: **“What’s Next?”**



*-Amanda Ball, New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program Coordinator*

**Gators, sugar cane, and humidity-** three things you just don't get in New Mexico. I had the privilege to experience Gator Nation, learn about the many important ag industries of Florida, and enjoy some beautiful weather during Class X's recent seminar in Gainesville. As the new coordinator for the New Mexico Agricultural Leadership program, a visit to Wedgworth was the perfect step in looking to build the capacity of our own program, and learn from the best in the field. Together we heard presentations on changing food consumer trends, the history and culture of both Swaziland and Scotland, tools for managing conflict, and much more. As with most conferences that whet my appetite for learning, I found myself walking away with one important question: what's next?

If you have ever watched the series “The West Wing”, you understand the significance of this question. The seven-season drama follows the presidency of Jed Bartlett, along with his White House staff in the early 2000s. From major political crises to small publicity blunders, President Bartlett's character uses this simple, stern, and direct quip to keep his staff focused and moving forward. In the series “what's next” is a sign to solve the next problem, to move on to the challenges waiting on the next line, and I can't help but wonder – how often do we ask ourselves the same thing?

As leaders in agriculture, we are called to answer this question on a personal, professional, and industry level every day. What do I do with the information I learned, the contacts I made, the moments of self-reflection I just experienced? How do I empower others to see this same vision for change, and how do I find the right champions to help me achieve it? Until we extract those ideas from our notes and memories, they remain abstract thoughts with mere intentions. It takes action, drive, initiative, and a little courage to turn those learning moments into leadership moments.

From the first day of orientation to the final applause at graduation, Wedgworth has been

preparing Class X to reach this tipping point in their leadership journey. I am incredibly impressed by the caliber of class members, the dedication of the Wedgworth staff, and the overwhelming support of alumni who make this one of the best agricultural leadership programs in the country. As Class X returns from their international experience and concludes their two-year leadership journey, this question will become a challenge, pushing them toward the future and keeping Florida agriculture strong, vibrant, and innovative.

So, to the members of Class X, one question for you: After Wedgworth....WHAT'S NEXT?



**“What do I do with the information I learned, the contacts I made, the moments of self-reflection I just experienced? ...Until we extract those ideas from our notes and memories, they remain abstract thoughts with mere intentions.”**



# Coordinator's Corner

## Expanding Boxes

-Valerie McKee, Program Coordinator

### Gainesville. Where it all began.

We came together as a class 20 months ago in Gainesville, FL. And, here we are once more. There's a few more gray hairs, a few more babies at home, a few job changes and a few more recognitions and honors. But alas, Class X is here for the final time.

We heard from a variety of incredible speakers and were led on awesome tours to experience a taste of northeast Florida agriculture production. There were two speakers who captured my heart's attention. Dr. CC Suarez, an assistant professor of Leadership Studies in the Agricultural Education and Communication Department at the University of Florida (UF), provided several thoughts to consider when communicating with someone from another culture. She talked to the class about breaking down assumptions and thinking more broadly to understand others' views. Mr. Jon Dain, Director of the Natural Resources Leadership Institute at UF, also worked with the class on recognizing others' values, interests, and backgrounds to communicate and work through conflict situations.

In a Utopian sense, these presentations moved me. Wouldn't it be great if we could immediately listen to understand before we listen to respond? Wouldn't it be swell to keep an open mind every time we meet someone new?

As I write this, Class X is preparing to travel to Swaziland and Scotland by scrolling Amazon Prime for travel accessories, consolidating business casual outfits to cover a 16-day span, and loading up on sunscreen, protein bars, fanny packs, and other international

travel-savvy items. We are excited and anxious, nervous about leaving our families, and eager to meet our hosts, tour guides, and new friends on the other side of the pond.

I imagine it will be easy to keep an open mind when we meet these individuals. After all, we are trusting them with our security and well-being. We will look to them for information on how to navigate the areas we will come across, and we be like sponges absorbing new knowledge about everything we see and smell and taste and feel. We will expect nothing and appreciate everything. It's easy to be open minded on an adventure like this, where it's in our best interest to be.

*"The international trip is going to be 16 days of expanding our boxes. We will have 16 days of opportunity to meet new people, try new foods, learn about new cultures, and expand our understanding of how the world works."*

Yet, how many times do I go into a new relationship with assumptions about the other person? How many times do we meet new people and use our values, our beliefs, our backgrounds, and our interests to determine their quality and 'worth' to us? It's a default mode that I think is really hard

to quit cold turkey.

I pause on this thought to also reflect on one of the most memorable evenings in the history of Class X. The international dinner, hosted by Mrs. Gale Trotter and Ms. Dottie Trotter, was an incredible night filled with cuisine and decor inspired by our destination countries. Everything about the evening was unforgettable, from a hired bagpipe player outfitted in Scottish attire and kilt to the beautiful venue – Belle Oaks Barn. (If you need a venue in the north central Florida area, this is the place you need to book!) However, the part of the evening that stood alone was the Class X whiffle ball tournament!

Now, disclaimer: something most don't know about me is that I am a highly competitive.

However, I have never been skillful in sports that require the use of a swinging apparatus. Thus, I was quite intimidated to play in this tournament with the class, knowing that my [lack of] skills were on the line. AND, to raise the stakes even higher, I was put on TIM BROCK's team, which was stacked with highly competent and confident players. My assumptions were that everyone was going to be able to hit the whiffle ball and make it to base except me... You know what the great thing about whiffle ball is?? EVERYONE strikes out! EVERYONE swings hard and misses. EVERYONE gets thrown out. It's hilarious and humbling to swing at or throw a whiffle ball, no matter who you are.

Recently, I had the fortune to listen to Mr. Elio Chiarelli as our first podcast guest for our new Wedgworth Alumni podcast. While Elio shared so many inspirational thoughts, one of my favorite moments from his presentation had to do with boxes... Essentially, Elio encouraged all those who listened to expand their "boxes"; rather than attempting to think outside the box, we should seek to make our box larger by meeting new people, pursuing new experiences, and living boldly.

I think Elio's words are applicable to the presentations we heard (and the Whiffle ball tournament) during Seminar X. When we put people in boxes with our assumptions, or when we let our values, interests, and experiences create small boxes for how we understand conflicts, we are letting these boxes hold us back from accepting, embracing, or learning more about others. Similarly, we ought to remember that even the most scary, intimidating experiences are felt by others as well. We shouldn't avoid expanding our box because of fear of failure. Instead, we should remember that everyone experiences the threshold of failure as they expand their boxes.

The international trip is going to be 16 days of expanding our boxes. We will have 16 days of opportunity to meet new people, try new foods, learn about new cultures, and expand our understanding of how the world works. My prayer is that I will remain open to these opportunities. That, and that I don't get sick on the flight like I did during the national trip.



## WEDGWORTH LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

*Developing Leaders for Florida Agriculture & Natural Resources*

For more information about the  
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