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## Winter Haven Trailblazers share life lessons with young professionals

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The Ledger

Published: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 at 12:27 a.m.

WINTER HAVEN — Erin Knothe and Kayla Smith were two of about 30 young professionals Tuesday who got lessons from Winter Haven leaders — or "trailblazers," as the Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce titled them at its round table event at the Winter Haven Woman's Club.

They got 10 minutes with each of nine trailblazers, including Mayor Brad Dantzler, Police Chief Charlie Bird and Polk State College President Eileen Holden, in a speed-dating-like situation where the moderator started with a question to spark discussions and ended each session with the ding of a bell. The event was coordinated by Endeavor, the chamber's young professional group.

"They gave very valuable advice," said Knothe, a communications specialist with GiveWell Community Foundation. "It applies to what I'm going through as someone who just recently got out of college, is trying to find my way and start my career."

Her favorite advice came from Cindy Price, regional manager of Tampa Electric Company.

The question when Price reached Knothe and Smith at table No. 8 was: What used to be your biggest weakness and how did you overcome it?

Price said her biggest weakness was and still is balancing her Type-A personality. Her advice to the young professionals was to learn to manage stress.

"It's important to laugh, have a good time, but get the work done," Price said. "It took me decades, but learn to chill out as early as you can."

Assistant City Manager T. Michael Stavres echoed a similar sentiment.

His question at table No. 8 was: What are you trying to accomplish this quarter?

Stavres, who also serves as the city's community services director, said he has "a million things going on. My goal is to keep all major projects moving forward."

But when he's off the clock, he spends his time playing music, exercising and, "doing anything I can to clear my head."

"Find something to do every day that's not related to your job," he added. "Your job helps you professionally and economically, but find something that helps you physically, spiritually and that will recharge your battery."

Smith, an accountant with Adamson & Co., said with it being tax season, she can use all the relaxation tips she can get.

Bird followed Stavres at table No. 8. His question: What would you have done differently in your career?

"I wouldn't change anything, because every mistake I have learned a lesson from,"

Bird said.

The biggest lesson he has learned, he said, is the importance of building relationships, "especially with people who are the most critical of you."

"In your career, you're going to have to have those difficult discussions," he added, "but you'll be surprised what good relationships come out of them."

Holden had a similar message.

Her question was: Have you ever had a mentor?

She said her mentor taught her that everyone is in the business of people.

"I've made mistakes on reports and audits — silly things," she said. "But the worst mistakes I have made were when I hurt people's feelings."

She stressed to the young professionals that no one gets do overs with people.

"Remember that even if they're in the back of the office, they are still a person and they don't want to be invisible," Holden said. "Do right by other people."

The young professionals also walked away with lessons from Mitsie Vargas with Orchid Springs Animal Hospital, Bonnie Parker with Citizens Bank & Trust Private Bank, Alan Turner with United Way of Central Florida and Hap Hazelwood with Six/Ten.

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