July 28, Berrien and Cook – Twenty-four participants from Berrien and Cook Counties recently graduated from the fourth annual cohort of LINC (Leadership in Neighboring Communities). LINC is a partnership among neighboring communities designed to develop and sustain leadership across the region. The program uses the University of Georgia Fanning Institute's *Community Leadership Program*, a curriculum with a proven track record of success. Embedded in the curriculum is the belief that effective leaders must continuously strengthen their skills and expand their knowledge.

"On behalf of the Cook and Berrien County Chambers, we congratulate the 2026 class of LINC," said Heather Green, Cook Chamber President. "Reflecting the diversity of our region, this class includes professionals from a wide range of sectors, including health care, K-12 education, local government, financial institutions, manufacturing, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and more. This diversity of experiences and perspectives created an engaging and productive class."

The Berrien County Chamber Executive Director, Lisa Smart, added "The LINC program is a powerful example of what can happen when neighboring communities work together with intention. By pairing a proven leadership curriculum with hands-on experiences across Berrien and Cook Counties, we are equipping emerging leaders with the skills, confidence, and regional understanding they need to make a lasting impact. I am honored to support this work and celebrate the achievements of the 2026 cohort."

During the graduation ceremony, UGA's Elizabeth Lutz offered special recognition to the graduating participants and commended Lisa Smart, Executive Director of the Berrien Chamber, and Mrs. Green for their commitment to the program and to developing leaders in their communities.

LINC's comprehensive program consisted of six modules designed to provide new and emerging leaders with a strong foundation for leadership development. A typical LINC training day included one of the six module presentations, along with community tours highlighting local industries in both counties. Class sessions rotate monthly between Berrien and Cook Counties, giving participants the opportunity to experience the strengths and assets of each community.

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