

WEDNESDAY'S CUP: Break bread with big-time leaders

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Executives in the Sarasota-Bradenton area who crave a lunch-based networking opportunity that doesn't revolve around providing referrals have a new option.

The group is called Lunch with Leaders. Dan Forbes, a financial adviser with the Bradenton office of Merrill Lynch, launched the group earlier this month. It's modeled after the Leaders Friday Luncheon group in Tampa.

The concept is a monthly lunch meeting with four previously assigned hosts and four invited guests. The discussions are informal, with one of the major rules being it's not a place for a sales pitch. Says Forbes: "It's an opportunity for people to sit down with people they otherwise wouldn't be able to meet."

The Leaders Friday Luncheon, launched in 2009, is a who's who of Tampa-area business, politics and philanthropy. The guests for the February lunch, for instance, were Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn; Grant Thornton partner Matt Dumar; Miles for Moffitt founder Karen Dalton; and Commander Lenny Richoux, with the Sixth Air Force Mobility at MacDill Air Force Base.

Forbes says he seeks the same types of decision makers and movers and shakers for Lunch with Leaders. The hosts for the group, who attend each monthly luncheon, will be Forbes, a onetime pastor who has also owned a real estate firm; Valerie Nelson, vice president of development at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Manatee County; Steve Hall, president of the Gulf Coast division of Alltrust Insurance; and Violeta Huesman, director of student services and graduate placement at Keiser University.

The first Lunch with Leaders is scheduled for March 23 at the Polo Grille in Lakewood Ranch. Scheduled guests invited by the hosts include State Rep. Greg Steube, R-Manatee; Manatee School Board member Julie Aranibar; and Laura Spencer, CFO of JCI Jones Chemical and former CEO of Tervis Tumbler.

For more information on Lunch with Leaders, or how to become a guest, visit the [Lunch with Leaders website](#).