

DWCUP YEAR IN REVIEW—2016

It is customary for the President of the Club to summarize the year every December, so I shall take a few minutes of your time to do that now.

In January of this year, we were still meeting at the Safety Harbor Library and heard a terrific environmental speaker named Aaron Metz. He emphasized the necessity for moving our society to renewable energy, and his work for the Climate Reality Project is helping local home and business owners make their buildings more energy efficient.

The beginning of the year also saw the work begin in earnest on the DWCF Convention scheduled for Sept in St Petersburg and Chaired by Mary Freeman and Region V members. Little did we know what a demanding undertaking this would become!

In February, our Club moved its membership meetings to the Clearwater Main Library. Mitch Perry, political reporter and blogger, spoke about the crazy political climate in this country and sparked a lively discussion.

Several of us attended Tally Days, Feb. 21-23, to support our Democratic legislators and lobby all of our legislators in support of our causes. We visited both houses while in session to watch the process in action.

At our March meeting, we were honored to hear Rep. Dwight Dudley, who is with us today, update us on the Florida Legislature in Tallahassee. His work in standing up to Duke Energy inspired all of us.

In April we did something a little different. To emphasize the down ticket on the ballot, we featured a panel discussion with Mary Lou Ambrose, Jeanne Crapeau and Diane Lebedeff discussing how to

run for precinct committeeperson, how to run a local campaign, and who's running for what office in Pinellas County. The grassroots efforts will always be an essential element in getting our candidates elected and our issues passed. The more familiarity we have with the process, the more effective we can be.

We exercised our right to choose our presidential delegation by voting in our local Congressional districts on May 7th and two of our members were selected to attend the National Democratic Convention. Toni Van Pelt, NOW leader, spoke to us at our May meeting about CEDAW, the Committee to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. It's an international agreement that our nation has not chosen to support except at the local level in certain cities.

In June, Michelle Mazuros, our Media Chair, led a workshop on the use of social media. We know how challenging it can be to learn to use twitter and facebook and feel like we're part of the 21st century.

A very special honor was bestowed upon one of our members that month as well: Jessie Forcan was named the National Federation of Democratic Women's Humanitarian of the Year at the nat'l convention in Charleston, SC. We congratulate her on this tremendous acknowledgement of her body of work.

June brought us into more intense efforts on behalf of the Hillary Clinton campaign and the whole blue ticket. I hosted a kickoff house party for the campaign as more of our members and others signed up to get involved. Work on local campaigns increased, such as the campaigns for Lorena Grizzle, Charlie Justice, Charlie Crist and more. We also focused on preparations for the state convention and attended the Girls Inc Stem Awards luncheon.

July was fun as we held a potluck in my Community Center and had Bob Dillinger, Public Defender, tell us about the Pack-a-Snack

program to feed hungry kids here in Pinellas County. We raised funds for the program right on the spot! The following evening our club hosted a viewing of the indie film: “Making a Killing: Guns, Greed and the NRA.”

In August we held our annual fundraising luncheon at the Royal Palms of Largo. Many of our local Democratic Pinellas candidates participated and spoke to our group, and we raised money both for our Club and for the candidates. It was a day of unity, strength and hope.

September was all about the DWCF State Convention in St Petersburg chaired by our own Mary Freeman. It was the major undertaking of our Region and our Club in particular this year. I was so proud of all of our members who devoted their time, energy, money, blood, sweat and tears to making it a tremendous success and an inspirational convention for the Democratic Women’s Club of Florida. Do we know how to throw a party!?!

Several of us got to see Hillary in person during the campaign and we all worked with lots of dedicated volunteers and staffers. What an exciting time! Many of us gathered to view the first debate together. Hillary was awesome!

Our Sept membership meeting featured Meri Forte-Namuj speaking about the issue of sea level change. We also heard from many candidates during the summer and autumn meetings. One of the best components of our Club is that our members meet and hear from local elected officials, leaders and candidates so they become informed voters on many issues. To that end, our speaker in October, County Commissioner Janet Long, discussed the numerous charter amendments on the ballot. We distributed palm cards to inform more voters about the positive candidates on the blue ticket.

In addition, throughout the year, our Club worked for and donated to several candidates, including Lorena Grizzle, April Thanos, Charlie Justice, Joanne Lentino, Ben Diamond, Jennifer Webb, and many more. We are proud of the victories of Charlie Crist, Charlie Justice, Ben Diamond, Joanne Lentino, and the defeat of Amendment 1 and passage of Amendments 2, 3, 4 and 5.

However, November 2016 is a month many of us can only describe in the darkest possible terms. The unthinkable happened as we lost the White House. I cannot speak of he who shall not be named; I will say that our lives have now become more difficult and the distance to our goals seems twice as far away as ever. We're beginning to see the impact of the November election as each day, cabinet and staff appointments are made that take our nation back to the days of robber barons, imprisonment for mental illness, and witch-burning. The new head of the EPA is an oil man, the Dept of Education has been handed over to a Republican mega-donor who wishes to dismantle public education in this country, and the new President's chief advisor is affiliated with neo-Nazis. It's a nightmare from which we are not waking.

But as the latest t-shirt says, "And you thought I was a Nasty Woman before? Buckle up, Buttercup!" We will continue to be vocal and visible in the new year and throughout our lives! We will remain strong and united. That's why I ask you to accept the safety pins we're giving you today as a symbol of that unity. We will not cower and lower our heads. We will not go away or be silent. We will square our shoulders, face the opposition, and support our beliefs to the utmost. To that end, I ask you to raise your glasses and toast the Democratic Women's Club of Upper Pinellas! Thank you so much!

--Donna M. Dennis, DWCUP President,

Dec. 2016