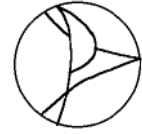


Community Matters

Obama Campaign Inspires South Hills Activists

By: Patricia A. O'Malley

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During the presidential election campaign, then-Senator Barack Obama encouraged his campaign volunteers to remain connected after the election, and to maintain the momentum by working together on local issues. A group of local Obama volunteers is doing just that. Since the election, the coordinators of the Obama South Hills campaign office in Mt. Lebanon have formed a new organization. It's called MESH – Mobilize and Empower the South Hills.

Group members want to honor the life of Martin Luther King and the election and inauguration of President Obama. Dave Brown, one of the "MESH Core" says, "Our combined energy is a powerful, positive force for change – or for maintaining the status quo, if that is what we feel is important. But let's not fool ourselves, in many ways the struggle is just beginning."

MESH defines the "south hills" very loosely. Generally, they're looking at the area east of Route 79 and south of Route 51. They plan to work mostly in Allegheny County, but are willing to stretch the lines depending on the projects and the members' interests.

The group has four primary goals: community service, advocacy on progressive agenda issues, volunteer organization, and periodic projects. They plan to conduct their own projects and collaborate with other organizations on larger tasks. According to their Web site, "a good project should be: concrete, helpful, informative, productive, progressive, economic, patriotic, green, empowering, unifying, enlightening – pick any three! For now, we hope it will just be obvious to everyone what to do next. We certainly don't want to get in the way of someone who has good ideas and is willing to back them up with hard work." They're open for suggestions.

So far, the group has held a luncheon to watch and celebrate President Obama's inauguration and organized a food drive that collected 3,000 pounds of food and more than \$400 for the South Hills Interfaith Ministry food pantry. There's also a film series and a letter-writing drive to thank Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Philadelphia, for voting in favor of the recent economic stimulus bill. They plan to be present at the Mt. Lebanon Earth Day celebration.

In the film series, the group screens DVD versions of politically progressive, lesser-known films. Each film is shown once per week for a full month. February's movie was "Hacking Democracy". March's entry is "Spin".

The organization has a very informal structure. The members will determine their activities and priorities. For the present, there are no meetings, dues, or requirements. It's still forming and growing. There is no physical office, but there is a Web site, www.mesh.bittsburgh.com.

The Web site contains a Frequently Asked Questions page and instructions on joining the group. Once you've joined, you'll have access to the membership list as well as pages with opinion polls, project information, and a forum for discussions on various topics.

This is truly a member-driven organization. Members' opinions are very important in deciding on projects and the group's direction. There are 112 members already. This is the time to put in your two cents. Why not take a look today?

As anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

For more information, go to www.mesh.bittsburgh.com.

To join, send an email to joinmesh@bittsburgh.com

Pat O'Malley is a consultant to nonprofit agencies.

Contact her at communitymatters@patomalley-consulting.com.

Read past columns at www.patomalley-consulting.com