

Council 13 AFSCME Women's Conference

March 2009

Council 13 AFSCME Women's Conference was held March 13-15 at the Hershey Lodge in Hershey, PA. The theme of this conference was "Yes We Can." This was one of the most attended for several years with almost 500 attendees. We were given a nice red bag with a book in it that was entitled **Women—A Celebration of Strength**. What a tremendous tribute to women from the past and present who changed the lives of all women with their courage and strength to see that we were well-represented in all walks of life! We started off the conference with the registration and welcoming of all the guests on Friday evening. We had a reception along with an auction where all the proceeds went to the PA Coalition of Prevention of Domestic Violence. I am happy to report that we collected over \$9,000 for this worthy cause. I have never seen so many baskets in one area in my life. The auction lasted for several hours, and the baskets included Steelers items; many wine and cheese baskets; theme baskets; and so many varieties that are too numerous to mention. We also saw lovely crocheted baby blankets and afghans in the mix too. I am happy to say I won a bid for a Steelers basket for Gary and a candle basket for myself. You may remember our union donated two baskets--one of which our staff rep Michelle won.

I want to share one item that appeared on our brochure for the conference entitled, **31 Dead in 31 Days in PA**. Summer in Pennsylvania turned out to be incredibly dangerous and deadly, but not because of stifling heat waves or raging storms. Rather, it was domestic violence that took its toll and claimed lives here in our commonwealth. From June 22 to July 22, 2008, 17 Pennsylvania counties experienced 18 lethal incidents—**the carnage left 31 people dead**. (Allegheny, Berks, Blair, Cambria, Clearfield, Dauphin, Delaware, Fayette, Franklin, Lackawanna, Lancaster, Lebanon, Philadelphia, Potter, Somerset, Susquehanna, Washington) The loss of life is profound, as is the impact of the loss on those left behind, especially the children—the five who were orphaned and the fourteen who lost one of their parents as a result of these terrible tragedies that forever altered their families and their futures. I am sure you and I know of someone who is now or may be a product of an abusive relationship. This is a very sad fact of life. I was happy to see the money raised support such a worthwhile cause.

Saturday we had greetings by the Chair of the Women's Committee, Cheryl Reynolds, and remarks by Dave Fillman. Then author Robin Gerber spoke to us about influential women in history concentrating on Eleanor Roosevelt. Robin wrote a book on Eleanor's life entitled **Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way**. What a wonderful legacy the First Lady left us women to strengthen and encourage us, and for us to emulate. Saturday also saw us attending two workshops—one in the morning and one in the afternoon. I attended the "A Well Body and a Well Mind-Cervical Cancer" workshop in the morning conducted by Carolyn Jacobson. Carolyn is the Director of Cervical Cancer Prevention Works for the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUM) and is actively working to educate women about the need to take care of their bodies and their minds.

In the afternoon I took the TTWWADI Yes, We Can Change workshop. This workshop was taught by Tyrone Smith. TTWWADI stands for That's the Way We Always Did It. This dynamic workshop was on the 'change curve'. He stated that some people just quit, rather than change. This class helped us see that we need to accept change and how to move beyond the negative responses related to change and to note what is most important. He 'sorted' us into groups using the year we were born and it was surprising to see that we older ones (born in the 40s) had very different views than the ones born in the 80s as to what is important in our lives. We stated that families, jobs, and respect were important. The 80s ladies said friends, technology, and appearances meant a lot to them. He tried to change the 80's thinking to the way we 40s thought, and vice versa, and met with some opposition. We were the TTWWADI gang. We said if it was good enough for our moms and dads it was good enough for us. I really enjoyed both workshops and they make you think about issues that you may not have thought about in a long time. Later in the evening we had our Hospitality and Women's Banquet at 6:30. It involved a nice dinner followed by a hypnotist show by Laura Amoroso and then DJ Chris Garrett played music for us. The food was delicious and the fellowship with other members from AFSCME proved to be an exciting way to end the evening. On Sunday after breakfast we presented the check to the lady representing the PA Coalition Prevention Domestic Violence, and then gave out the award to AFSCME Council 13's Well Rounded Woman. The award went to Tamika Nared out of district council 88 Local 1439-- Northwestern Human Services. She was nominated by Council 13 Vice President from DC-88 Michelle Owens, who is also the president of her local.

A picture was also given as a gift from Darrin Spann, Executive Assistant, at Council 13 to Aldine Owens from Millersville University who did a presentation at our last year's women's conference about her sister and the abuse her sister went through before losing her life to her abuser. It was a very emotional presentation. Aldine was very appreciative of this award (a picture) in her sister's honor. The picture depicted an empty chair at the table symbolizing a family member that is gone because of domestic violence. I do not think there was a dry eye in the house. I certainly enjoyed the conference and want to thank the executive board and the local for permitting me to attend and to represent Local 2360 at the 2009 Women's Conference.

Sharon R. Heverly
President, Local 2360