

"Federation Corner" column
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Federation newsletter full of information

by Jim Humphrey
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The Montgomery County Civic Federation publishes a monthly newsletter for the ten months of the year from September through June. MCCF does not hold monthly meetings in either July or August, and therefore does not publish a newsletter in those months. The newsletter is normally published around the first of the month in anticipation of that month's delegate assembly, usually held the evening of the second Monday of the month.

A primary focus of each newsletter is to inform and educate the delegates about the issues that will be considered at the upcoming meeting for that month. A cover story in most every issue concerns the topic of the program for the upcoming meeting, written by the MCCF Executive Committee member who volunteered to line up the speakers for the panel and to act as emcee for the event. The September program, for example, was on Maryland State implementation of the Affordable Care Act. And since MCCF First Vice President Paula Bienenfeld volunteered to coordinate the program, she wrote the newsletter article.

Each month's newsletter also contains materials needed by delegates in order to prepare for the business meeting portion of the upcoming meeting: the minutes from the last month's meeting (which need to be accepted by vote of the delegates); the wording of any resolutions which will be brought up for a vote of the delegates (many of which aim to establish a Federation position on legislation, policies or programs being considered by the county government); and other useful information on issues currently being monitored by any of the nine standing committees of the MCCF.

The Federation newsletter sometimes also contains news about upcoming community activities, or events being held by other county non-profit groups. And issues in the fall of the year often include a copy of the membership application form, which makes it easy for new members to sign up and existing members to renew their membership.

In addition, the monthly MCCF newsletter traditionally includes a President's Message, a kind of opinion column that allows the current president to discuss either specific issues or broad-ranging topics of countywide import which they believe are important for Federation delegates to consider.

To give readers of this newspaper a taste of the kind of issues addressed in the MCCF President Message, the following is the column from the Federation newsletter published the first of this month, September 2013.

Making real change after the campaign, by Carole Ann Barth, MCCF President

"The campaign season has started. My inbox is full of invites to kick-off events, and every social gathering seems to have its coterie of earnest potential candidates. I don't have any campaign wisdom to impart, but I do have some suggestions on how to be an effective office-holder should you be elected.

"Appropriate staffing is one key to effectiveness (or lack thereof). It seems to me that staffing styles can be illustrated by considering three staff archetypes: the "politico", the "activist", and the "work".

"The politico is probably the most common staff archetype. Politicians have a tendency to hire other aspiring politicians as staff people. This apprentice-type relationship provides valuable experience for the aspiring politician, while giving the office-holder a loyal political partner. But it may not be the best approach to governing.

"A staff person who views his/her job as a stepping stone has little incentive to fully engage the potential of that job to improve communities or serve constituents. Instead, they are more likely to see their role as "protecting" their boss from unwarranted contact with citizens. Unless the citizen input is politically significant (e.g. over 200 emails received on a topic), staff filters it out.

"Contrast this with the activist, who relishes the opportunity to engage the public in order to make change. The activist will affirmatively seek ideas and information from citizens, and strive to understand different communities. The activist will then try to leverage what they've learned to inform policy and build long-term partnerships to push for change.

"Lastly we have the wonk. Part researcher and part manager, the wonk is all about the deep knowledge of policy issues. Data-driven, the wonk considers the potential unintended consequences of proposed legislation, policies, or decisions. Put another way, the wonk analyzes program effectiveness rather than program popularity.

"Too often, elected officials surround themselves with politicos only. While it's important to know which way the political winds are blowing, it doesn't tell you how to solve the problems we face as a society. For that, you need to understand the problems. You need a wonk who can give you objective information and an activist who can connect you with the citizens who are striving to address those same problems."

Issues of the MCCF newsletter can be accessed for free on the Federation website--
www.montgomerycivic.org--so the information contained in these monthly gems is available to any member of the public who wishes to read them.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to the montgomerycivic@yahoo.com