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News, election, elections, Los Angeles

Local Delegates at Denver Convention

posted Aug. 28, 2008, 12:00:00 pm

Jude DeLorca

Longtime L.A. Westsider and now Denver resident Jude DeLorca filed the following dispatch from the Democratic National Convention Tuesday evening, August 26.

Santa Monica's Wendy Wanderman and Venice's Victoria Duffy Hopper are among the delegates gathered in Denver this week for the Democratic National Convention, and each brings her own perspective and special talents from her home base to this Mile-High City sweltering under summer heat with clear skies and an electric atmosphere of anticipation and good will.

Centered in downtown Denver, the smiling throngs of this nation's delegates are bringing messages of hope, change, and thoughtful consideration of policies. Buoying them are thousands of volunteers, Denver's host hotel staff personnel, police and sheriff departments, businesses, and the warmth of the individual Denver resident.

Hosted forums of a mind-boggling range are available to the delegates, some to the general public as well, from progressives to more traditional Democratic Party visions. Venetian Victoria Hopper has put together the most challenging and informative idea forums ever available at a Convention, as described below. Truly change is visible within the Convention.

The 16th Street Mall, which serves as the geographical centering spot for the delegates, has also been the scene of protesters waving banners and halting the shuttles: "REPENT – JESUS SAVES – HELL AROUND THE CORNER" – "VOTE McCain 2008" – "NO TO WAR" – "OBAMA PLAGIARIST." The ubiquitous police and security – many in riot-ready uniform and in bands, some with horses, some with mountain bikes, some in plainclothes with microphones and receivers seemingly part of their facial anatomy – roam, stalk, and pace. The white Denver police cars are parked up on curbs throughout the downtown, Capitol Hill, and West Colfax and Speer Boulevards. The drone of helicopters is so constant that soon you don't hear them anymore.

Pepsi Center is draped with shirred red, white, and blue banners on a clear, mile-high balmy night as the delegates face security ID check and snake into the Center. Later, after the elation of Monday's opening night of Convention, the delegates claimed the night and Denver to celebrate and congratulate one another – bringing a formality to the habitually informal Denver, as if one's great aunt were visiting. Within walking distance is a concentration of hottest night spots, drinking troughs (there is great pride in regional breweries), authentic blues and jazz, Generation X clubbing, and international cuisine.

You heard in the ladies room from an African American delegate from San Jose – “Our journey is almost complete.” In the California delegation's Sheraton Hotel – the handsome, vibrant volunteer from Oakland who scrimped for over a year to pay own his way to “be of some use and be part of history and say I did something to help.” A retired professor of American Government and History from Northern California speaks of our being in an “age of peril.” A Latino public works overseer proudly says, “We've hosted many major sports events – but now maybe this makes us a ‘real serious City.’ “ A respected bar owner in the oldest black neighborhood in the city states, “I never would have believed in 2006 that this day would come.” And many have expressed what a literate and thoughtful North Carolina African American transplant here in Denver stated, “Look beyond the past, look to the future.”

Into this mix we met with two powerful, bright Santa Monica and Venice residents who define much of their lives by the work and progress they produce on behalf of the Democratic Party and progressive thought.

Wendy Wanderman, a delegate at large from Santa Monica, is an independent film producer who most recently was Executive Producer of the critically acclaimed *Into the Fire*, a 90-minute documentary aired on the History Channel and hailed for its outstanding insight into the lives and daily heroics of firefighters.

She is an ardent supporter and effective campaigner and fundraiser for Sen. Obama since, as a delegate to the 2004 convention, she heard his July 27, 2004 keynote address for John Kerry in Boston's Fleet Center. “I was there watching Obama speak,” Wanderman told the Mirror. “I said we've just seen somebody who ... is the most unusual moment in the entire campaign ... His speech that night sent chills down every spine in the entire ... Fleet Center.”

She was then spurred to reading his books. "... Reading Audacity of Hope was transforming ...What blew me away was the section on constitutional law ... our entire Constitution for the last seven years has been ripped apart, and here was a guy that was going to restore our civil liberties and understand what privacy means ... understand what our founding fathers put together."

After Obama's 2004 keynote speech, Wanderman began heavy-duty fundraising on his behalf and feels inspired by the new direction the Senator, as President, can take the Democratic Party in uniting various ideologies to forge the change so badly needed in the Executive Branch.

"The very first time I met [Obama] and said to him, 'Senator, I've mapped out the next part of your life for you ... You're going to serve as President for the next years and then you're going to serve on the Supreme Court; there is no one that understands the Constitution better than you ... He looked at me and said 'That sounds pretty good.'"

Victoria Duffy Hopper is a delegate from Venice who serves on the Convention Platform Committee; she is an entertainment executive and producer/partner in a unique firm that has produced some of this Convention's most informative and important offerings. An accomplished actress in her own right, she is also the wife of actor Dennis Hopper, said to be a staunch Republican, although it has been reported elsewhere that he is re-evaluating his voting options in November.

With her business partner, Jamie McGurk of Beverly Hills, Victoria has formed SeaChange Communications, an L.A.-based firm specializing in producing events with social impact, focusing on bringing together the business, nonprofit, entertainment, social, and political worlds.

Hopper and McGurk met working together on the 2004 Kerry campaign, Hopper remembers, and they felt the Democratic Party and progressive movement had better policies that benefit more people, but there was "a slightly weak link in how we communicate." They first came to the realization, Hopper continued, "Those policies become lost and no change in society, so Jamie and I formed SeaChange Communications to focus on the communication aspect of the Democratic Party or the Progressives so that people can communicate their good ideas in a way that connects them."

They then came to the conclusion, McGurk states, "that all these nonprofit organizations are often experts in their policy area, but not in terms of marketing ... We wanted to bring the private sector marketing tools so they will use them and become more effective.

Thus, four months of very hard work in organizing and scheduling culminated with the SeaChange Communications STARZ Green Room Event for four days of the most challenging, riveting mix of important panel discussions and presentations at this Convention, author lectures, films, cocktail parties, and providing the ability to watch the live convention programming. Not only is this event open to the delegates, but to elected officials, Democratic staffers, business executives, foreign dignitaries, media, and the entertainment industry.

On Monday a SeaChange live debate was listed for an hour between Thom Hartmann (Air America host) and Dennis Prager (radio talk host and author); Clinton's pollster Geoff Garin was speaking on "A Better World Campaign: Shifts in U.S. Attitudes Towards Foreign Policy"; later in the week Tom Hayden, Carl Pope, Jim Garrison, Donna Brazile, James Carville, and David Sirota will be holding discussion groups.

Although Hopper does not emphasize or speak of her considerable "celebrity factor" – it allows her to have the resources and trust to bring in fellow high-profile people – so that Josh Brolin, Ben Affleck, Chris Moore, Kerry Washington, and Daryl Hannah will add insights on very targeted subjects close to each of their political passions.

When asked how she came to support Sen. Obama, Hopper said, "I had known Obama a long while before the 2004 campaign speech, so have been a supporter for a long time ... Jamie and I both agree he has a real talent for communicating in such a way that connects people ... yes, visionary ... he inspires people ..."

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