

THE NEXT GENERATION: Uniting for Justice

The Gray Panthers convention, this year was held in Rockville, Maryland from October 26-28, 2013. The Board Members from all over the country began work on the day before the convention officially began.

The New York Chapter members present at the convention were Joan Davis, Jenny Olaya, Andrew Grossman (Board Member), Nino Nannarone, and Rimas Jasin (Board Member).

Saturday, 26 October, 2013: We were ceremoniously welcomed by Judy Lear (outgoing Chair) and Jan BenDor (incoming Chair) and staff Sally Brown (GP Executive Director), and Shadia Henson (Office Operations Manager).

We were greeted in the evening with a buffet supper and two speakers. Paul Nathanson from Florida, (former National Secretary of Gray Panthers) who knew and worked with Maggie Kuhn, presented a lively look at the beginnings of the Gray Panthers.

Andrew Grossman is the newest member of the Board. He spoke about the critical factor in his becoming a Gray Panther which he said was our attitude to young people. He saw that we "are interested in the well-being of the young --not just in the affairs of older people."

Sunday, 27 October 2013: The day began with a business meeting in which we ratified the Bylaws and voted on Issue Priorities. The number one priority was "Economic Security." Interestingly enough, "Peace" was last on the survey. Members then broke into small groups to discuss strategies and solutions. Paul Nathanson distributed copies of current legislation which needs support. "Supplemental Security Income Restoration Act of 2013" (H.R. 1601) was introduced by Representative Raul M. Grijalva (AZ - R) on April 17, 2013 and has 11 sponsors. It was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

The rest of the day was filled with different panelists. We even had a speaker from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) while we had lunch. The great wonder of this day was the comprehensive nature of the program and the vast amount of networking opportunities which presented themselves to us. We felt the full impact of this year's convention theme, "The next generation: Uniting for Justice." Herein lies our strength -- networking!!

It was satisfying that there was discussion of such a broad range of issues which culminated in the last speaker for the afternoon. The Very Rev. Gary Hall, Dean of Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., addressed the attendees with an uplifting message of hope, "Go forth in peace and justice."

Before we called it a day, Judy Lear organized our next morning's activity -- we paired-up for "Blitz Day" on Capitol Hill.

Monday, 28 October 2013: The Blitz on Capitol Hill came off without a hitch. Seven (7) teams of two (2) Gray Panthers enlivened the three buildings which "house" the offices of our representatives. (Cannon, Longworth and Rayburn office buildings). By the end of the morning, we had covered 393 offices. [See "GRAY PANTHERS' FEDERAL BUDGET SOLUTIONS"].

Our message to everyone is that "We want our taxes to be spent in ways that put people before profits."

The afternoon was a "coda" to the convention. There was a big gathering at Ralph Nader's Public Citizens' Office where Judy Lear presented the Gray Panthers' Social Justice Award to Marian Wright Edelman on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of her founding of The Children's Defense Fund.

To conclude this report, we close with the words of Jenny Olaya, "This is my first-ever Gray Panthers Convention. It was welcoming, informative and positive. Thank you, fellow Gray Panthers. And I look forward to the next convention."