

SC Progressive Network meets for 20th annual fall gathering

Grassroots activists from across the state will meet for the SC Progressive Network's fall retreat, a weekend of fellowship, networking, and organizing. This is our first overnight meeting since politics imploded on the national and state level. The landscape has shifted dramatically, and we will take advantage of new opportunities while addressing new challenges.

Friends and allies will gather at Santee State Park at its autumnal finest to talk politics, build alliances, sharpen strategies, and recharge our batteries.

Space limited
REGISTER NOW
Call 803.808.3384

Reps from our Network member groups will share their victories and challenges, and offer ways for you to join or collaborate.

We'll get the latest scoop from the Network's government watchdog, **John Crangle**, who reporters are calling for informa-

tion and the governor and attorney general are calling for counsel. Since drafting ethics laws after the 1992 Lost Trust scandal that sent 17 lawmakers to jail, he is the state's go-to guy for insight into the legislature.

We'll get a legislative forecast from Progressive Caucus members **Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter** and **Sen. Mike Faning**. We'll discuss bills we are introducing, tracking, and backing. Find out about our inside/outside strategy – how it is working and how we are winning.

Come for a day or the whole weekend. We promise you will leave more energized and inspired than when you arrived.

Please RSVP at 803.808.3384 so we can prepare.



For retreat information, and to register and pay on line, go to www.scpronet.com. Or register by calling 803.808.3384.

Modjeska School graduates putting new skills to work

On June 25, a third class graduated from the Modjeska Simkins School for Human Rights, a project of the SC Progressive Network launched in 2015 to help build and sustain a state-based movement for social change.

As they picked up their diplomas, graduates shared their thoughts about the experience. Lauren Greene said, "This class absolutely exceeded my expectations – the material, the presentations, the guest speakers. It was really phenomenal. There was so much I didn't even know I didn't know."

Cont. on back page



Graduates of the spring session of the Modjeska Simkins School.

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Score 1 for the 99%

You're doing God's work," Mary Posey told Network Director Brett Bursey when he called to say that the plot of land in Lower Richland she started paying for in 1997 was finally hers.

Nobody thought it would happen. The two had taken on one of the county's largest landowners and won, after months of work and against all odds.

When Rep. Joe Neal died suddenly in February, the SC Progressive Network made a rare endorsement to support Wendy Brawley in the special election to fill his seat to ensure that his replacement would advance the work he shared with the Network, which he helped found. (You can meet Brawley at the fall retreat.)

Brawley's main opponent was Heath Hill, who inherited 68 square miles of Lower Richland from his father when he died in 2002.

During the campaign, Bursey learned of Hill's reputation for questionable ethics. When he discovered that the mother-in-law of a mutual friend was among his victims, Bursey paid her a visit. They made a short video that was circulated

widely. (See it on YouTube.)

It was a brave move for the woman who didn't want to make waves and had intended to let the matter go. Bursey, however, could not. After Brawley won, he worked to pressure Hill to follow through on the deal his father made with Posey in 1997, when she began making payments on the land.

When the elder Hill died, Posey owed \$300 on the \$4,920 debt. While the contract required her to pay off the note in 18 months, he had told her to pay what she could as she was able. But when she tried to make the final payment to Heath Hill, he said she'd waited too long. He kept the money and the land.

Without bank records to prove payment, lawyers advised that there was no legal recourse. But never one to give up with-



Rep. Joe Neal's sister Wilma Garren hugs Mary Posey at a party to celebrate her victory. Network Director Brett Bursey holds a framed platt that is now in Posey's name.

out a fight, Bursey went to Hill directly and asked him to do the right thing, and shared with him some of the stories and research he'd uncovered during the campaign. Bursey then took the information to Hill's attorney.

On Aug. 8, Posey took \$300 to the attorney's office, signed the deed and, after 20 years, took ownership of the land. A few weeks later, friends and family gathered for a fish fry to thank Posey for her courage and to savor a rare win in Lower Richland. ▼

Network forum on SC's latest ethics scandal packs room

Is political corruption incurable, or can it be treated? That was the question at a public forum on May 17 that featured three panel discussions with some of the state's experts. If the buy-in from the media and the people who turned out to talk about our



failing democracy are any indication, times are ripe for reform. An indicator is that the governor's office called the Network to apologize for missing the event.

With yet another political scandal brewing, it is clear that we have a problem. The good news is that the political and corporate money scandals provide opportunities for real change.

The Network has been working to reduce the causes of corruption for more than 20 years. We've concluded that unless we can make serious structural and cultural changes in the way we practice democracy in South Carolina, we will continue to allow private profits to dictate public policy.

Historically, our incumbent legislators, who win office with the existing rules and voters, have been disinclined to change a

system that is working fine for them. They have resisted efforts to make it easier to vote, and have ignored legislation that would create a system of public financing for the General Assembly.

With the existing political structure rotting from the inside out, we have an opportunity to advance a prescription for that which ails us. ▼



Network lobbyist John Crangle answers a question at the forum, moderated by WIS-TV's Jack Kuenzie. He shared the panel with Rick Brundrett of The Island Packet and retired Sen. Mike Rose.

Meet the 2017 candidates for Network office

The SC Progressive Network is comprised of two organizations that are related but kept separate by federal law.

The SC Progressive Network Education Fund (501-c-3) is our research and policy institute that must be nonpartisan to accept grants and work with schools and other institutions that take tax-deductible contributions. Nonprofit organizations make up the membership of the Network's Education Fund. Each has

a seat and a vote on the board of directors. The Education Fund's board elects the officers of its executive committee. Member groups select their own representative.

The Network's (501-c-4) is comprised of individual members. Contributions to the c-4 are not tax-deductible, and members can engage in political campaigns and endorse candidates. Our individual members are the boots on

the ground needed to educate, agitate and organize around the Education Fund's policy work.

The executive committees are elected by members at annual meetings. All dues-current members are entitled to nominate, run for, and vote for officers.

To check your dues status or make a nomination, email Kyle@scpronet.com or call 803-808-3384.

Network Education Fund (C-3) and (C-4) executive committee nominees

Ed Fund Co-Secretary

Shannon Colley Herin was born and raised in East Tennessee, but chose to live most of her adult life in South Carolina. She is a retired educator from Lexington & Richland School District 5, and her credentials include a Master's Degree in Literacy, National Board Teacher Certification, and serving as a USC Coaching Teacher.

She is a member of Washington Street United Methodist Church and works as a volunteer with Lutheran Services Carolinas serving refugee families. Shannon is a 2017 graduate of the Modjeska Simkins School.



"The people of South Carolina have trusted their elected officials far too long without any real accountability. I am eager to support the strategic work of the South Carolina Progressive Network as it shines a light on the ugly side of politics in our state and offers solutions."

Ed Fund Treasurer

In order to avoid the snow and cold of the North, **Katie Schulz** moved to South Carolina as an Americorps Volunteer in 2003. She has since worked for a number



the Modjeska School.

"The wide variety of backgrounds and experiences of members of the SC Progressive Network is ultimately our greatest strength."

Network (C-4) nominees

Membership Liaison

Sarah Keeling has been nominated to replace Kyle Criminger in welcoming new members and representing their interests to both executive committees.

Sarah grew up in West Virginia and North Augusta, SC. She holds an M.Ed. and a

Ph.D. in higher education administration from the University of South Carolina. Sarah is active in racial justice work, and formed the Columbia chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) in July 2016.

She is a graduate of the 2017 Modjeska Simkins School for Human Rights. Sarah works with college students to pay her bills.

Co-Chair

Carol Singletary is nominated to replace Hoyt Wheeler, who is stepping down but has pledged to continue to offer his expertise in workers' rights.



Carol is a Modjeska School graduate who is the facilitator of our Racial Profiling Project. Carol graduated from Claflin University and holds a Master's degree in Human Behavior and Conflict Management from Columbia College.

In 2003, after retiring as the Director of Youth Programs for SC Dept. of Social Services, Carol became the Senior Advisor for Outreach at the SC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Carol is the social action coordinator for the Francis Burns United Methodist Church. ▼

Richard Sylvester hadn't planned on taking the course, but after dropping his partner off at the first class and seeing the curriculum, he decided to enroll. "I was hesitant to come at the beginning because I knew I would learn things that would just make me mad. I hope I can do something to help rectify the things that are less than they could be"

Shannon Herin thanked him "for sticking with me. That made it extra special. It was an amazing curriculum – and if you're like me you will still be reading that curriculum for many years. This is a very smart community of activists because we're not just angry. This is a group that wants to get smart, stay smart, and to be intentional about their actions. That's a great strength."

She said the day included a personal point of celebration. "This little blue dress was worn on that day in November when I went to vote for the first female president. You can still see the tear stains on it. I put this on the back of my door, and wasn't going to put it back in the closet until I did something. So it means a lot that I'm wearing it today."

"The school opened my eyes to the fact that it's no accident that we're in the situ-



Student Erica von Shenk and daughter Scarlet Baker at the graduation party.

ation we're in; it's intentional," Melissa Watson said. "To see local icons' work motivated me to want to work."

Donald Martin is not a South Carolina native, so he was glad to learn more about its history. "I grew up in the era of Jim Crow, so that wasn't surprising to me; what was surprising is to look across the room and see young people and older people, and I thought we wouldn't still be talking about this. It just shows

that the struggle is not over. I feel the spirit of Modjeska Simkins inside me. That's why I came to join this movement – and this is a movement."

Sherri Simmons said, "It was a great opportunity. I was never bored. It has been an eye-opening experience to learn about the state."

Thomas Hammond said his father gave him the money to take the course. "He gave me an understanding how impor-

tant it is to know your history. So taking this class and being involved with the Progressive Network has been an extension of what my dad gave me. It would be easy to be ashamed about where you come from, but I feel like if you make the effort to overcome your history then you don't have to feel ashamed."

Beverly Frierson and her sister Delaine Frierson took the class together. "Throughout history," she said, "the powers that be have promoted an us-against-them philosophy for the benefit of the rich and powerful. It's so ingrained that either people are too disillusioned to take action, or they act against their own interests or – even worse – sometimes they form alliances with the oppressor."

She said the class made her feel empowered. "The most impactful thing to me is understanding that human beings are capable of transformation. We have to have faith in the capacity of people to change. It starts with us."

Network Director Brett Bursey said the school has been one of the most gratifying and promising projects he's worked on in his 49 years as an organizer. "The Modjeska School is meeting a critical need for progressive leadership at just the right time," he said. "I've been impressed with the students' understanding that a revolution of social values is a lifetime commitment. They are the agents of change."

After graduating, most of the class signed up for additional training on the Network's core projects. Congratulations to them all! ▼

Grow the grassroots!
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