

The Anderson County Democratic Women's Club News

September 2022

<https://acdwc.org/>

This Month

Meet the Candidates

September 17, 2022 – 2:00 to 4:00 pm -- Oak Ridge Marina Pavilion
(next to the Oak Ridge Rowing Association) 697 Melton Lake Dr, Oak Ridge, TN 37830

The Anderson County Democratic Party is hosting Jason Martin (for TN Governor), Meg Gorman (for Congress), and Jim Dodson (for TN State Representative) to discuss their plans and positions with you. Bring your questions and enthusiasm for our Democratic candidates!

The ACDP will also honor our long serving County Commissioner, Jerry Creasey for his leadership and efforts over the past decades.

We are anticipating a full house so please arrive early if you require a seat. A BYO lawn chair is also an option.

Future ACDWC Events

Healthcare in East TN –
October (date TBD)

Trivia Night –
November (date TBD)

Holiday Party –
December (date TBD)

Other Events

An opportunity to make our voices heard -- Thursday October 13th the Knox County Republican Party is having a Lincoln Day Dinner at the Rothchild Catering and Conference Center. Guest speakers for this event are Tim Burchett and Lauren Boebert. Stay tuned for more information.

Amanda Gorman takes a stand for abortion rights – a powerful poem from the National Youth Poet Laureate. [Watch here](#)

Walk for our lives – Francie Hunt from TAPP will be walking 538 miles to embody the protracted struggle that the fall of Roe means for the progressive movement. She and Tennessee women will be walking from Sept 26th to Nov 14th. The ACDWC will be supporting the walk through this area with pickups/drop-offs, water/snacks, and a support wagon if your gusto outpaces your body's capability. [For more information on the walk...](#)

Club Updates

Tennessee Federation of Democratic Women: Please congratulate Jan Newsome on shouldering the VP duties for our East Tennessee district.

Paula Daniels (half of our Hospitality Committee) earned her Emergency Medical Responder certification. We all hope you will never see Paula in her professional capacity, but if you do you will be in great hands. Congratulations Paula !

Last Month's Meeting: Homelessness in Anderson County

Dave Clark - Anderson County District Attorney:



The 2022 bill to modify the Equal Access to Public Property Act of 2012 makes it a Class E Felony to camp on public property - out of designated areas and without permission. It does require that a warning be issued first. Upon further violation, the arrest can be made. A Class E Felony carries a sentence of 1-6 year in prison and/or up a fine of up to \$3000. Tennessee Senator Paul Bailey introduced the SB 1610 and said he did it so the homeless would get help. Note that prior to this, it was illegal to camp on public property as it was trespassing. But it was a Class C misdemeanor which is only 30 days in jail and/or up to a \$50 fine.

There are many crime issues concerning homelessness. Too often there are alcohol or drug problems, which can lead to theft and trespass. However, the homeless are often victims of crime too. There is one man, "the Beast" (6'5" tall 350 lbs.), being held in Rocky Top for rape and assault of primarily homeless people. He had apparently done similar crimes in California and had travelled to Rocky Top specifically for its homeless population.

Why is Rocky Top a magnet for the homeless? It is right on I-75 and has a small police department. There are a few rundown hotels, and at night people emerge from the woods and hang out downtown. Incomes in Rocky Top and the neighboring remote areas are much lower than in other parts of the county. There is also a greater problem with inherited mental illness and the long-term effects of incest (a crime so common that it is considered normal behavior). Tennessee has also cut funding for mental health in recent years, which exacerbates the problems that lead to homelessness.

Sheila Michel, Board Chair/Founder -- Tennessee Out-Reach Center for Homeless (TORCH)

In 2011 Sheila noticed Oak Ridge was changing, and worked with city leaders (civic, non-profit, religious) to identify the one need that wasn't being met - homelessness. In 2012 she formed a 501(c)3 and TORCH opened their doors in 2013. The early years were full of learning the programs that are currently available and the limits of those programs. For instance, funding from HUD can only be used to help people who are already homeless, not to prevent homelessness in those teetering on the edge of eviction. However, HUD will not reimburse for hotel stays, even if there are no other options. On the other hand, United Way can help people who are not yet homeless but on the cusp. ADFAC can help with rental assistance, even for single people.

Who are TORCH clients? TORCH's vision is that no family or disabled person stays on the streets. Ms. Michel noted that no one chooses to be homeless, and 60% of TORCH's clients are homeless for the first time. Most are embarrassed and afraid when they come to TORCH. Once in stable housing they are usually able to stay in that housing. Of the remaining homeless population, 20% are chronically homeless, 12% have substance or mental health issues (TORCH works to arrange treatment for these folks), and the remaining 8% are the truly stereotypical image of a homeless person.

60% are first time homeless where an injury, illness, or some other tragic event left them having to choose between food, medicine, utilities, or rent. Most have children. Most have, or are currently working; however, minimum wage usually means a life in poverty and one event away from homelessness. The recent push to have housing cost no more than a third of the monthly income has created a backlash where landlords require the

tenant to make 3 times the rental price (not including Section 8 Vouchers or other assistance). The result is that most stay in cars in parking lots or in front of friend's or family's houses.

A couch surfing family may not qualify for government assistance since they do not have a rental contract. Many homeless kids sleep on family/friend's couches while the adult sleeps in the car, technically homeless.

TORCH case managers look for public housing options whenever they can. 20% cannot afford housing at their minimum wage income. If they are working multiple part-time jobs, they come with no benefits and therefore no health care, putting them at risk of unexpected medical expenses. Public Housing is a good option for this type of homeless family. TORCH will pay for utilities connection and first/last month rent. To get Section 8 Housing, a family must find a fair-market housing rental unit within 2 months of applying. This is getting hard to do. If they can't find housing within 2 months, they must start the entire application process/qualification process over. Fortunately, TORCH and homeless families have a friend with Maria Catron in Oak Ridge's Housing Authority.

They also house families in hotels (\$50/night hotel rooms for up to 9 months). Last year they provided hotel vouchers for 36 families with over 70 children – a cost supported entirely by local donors. Another resource is Agape House, which has 3 units with one reserved for domestic violence victims. The original vision for Agape House was as transition housing, where the residents move into permanent housing within 90 days. However, due to a lack of housing to move into to after an Agape House stay that vision is no longer practical. TORCH housed 9 families last year at Agape House.

TORCH case managers are seeing new challenges finding affordable rentals as properties are being sold. Many properties that were rental units are being purchased to own – removing them from the rental market. To address the shortage, TORCH is building a 4-plex and eventually 2 duplexes on Hamilton Circle to house up to 29 people.

TORCH is there to help their clients find housing and get back on their feet. In all TORCH found housing for 187 families (426 people) last year. They have an 86% retention rate with their first home placement. Why the 14% failure? Sometimes there is a beloved pet that the family simply cannot bear to leave behind. Sometimes they find a family member that is willing to take them in, and TORCH will help by paying their bus ticket.

Contact the ACDWC

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