



WOMAN'S CITY CLUB HONORS THREE FEISTY WOMEN AT ITS THIRTEENTH ANNUAL FEIST TEA



Feist Tea Honorees (L-R): Janet Buening, Denisha Porter and Melissa Currence

Our 13th Annual Feist Tea celebration that took place at the Kennedy Heights Art Center Annex on December 4 attracted 74 members and friends to honor Woman's City Club's 2022 Feisty Women – Janet Buening, Melissa Currence, and Denisha Porter. And, how great it was being together in-person! All attendees could feel the synergy and air of celebration as soon as they entered the banquet room. This lively, interactive, and relaxed event feted this year's feisty honorees as well as previous honorees, past presidents, and new members. Starting with an enjoyable social hour, the afternoon Tea offered light fare catered by Catered with Grace and a memorable slide show compiled by Jeff Dey, reminding us of this past year's wonderful

programs and activities. Additionally, Marge Davis recognized Sister Judy Tensing and Mark Shannon, past leaders of Venice on Vine, for their dedication to and passion for supporting those in need.

Mike Maloney celebrated the many contributions to the community of our beloved Louise Spiegel, who died in July 2022. Louise was fondly known as the Queen of Feist Tea, presiding over the festivities for many years.

Three remarkable women, Janet Buening, introduced by Beth Sullebarger, Melissa Currence, introduced by Jan Seymour, and Denisha Porter, introduced by Cathy Bailey, were honored for their passionate dedication and advocacy to making a difference in our regional community.

In the spirit of giving thanks and recognizing contributing members, I would like to thank Harriet Kaufman for photographing this event as well as Dennis Finney, Dennis Kinne, and Mike Maloney for serving as our bartenders.

On behalf of the Feist Tea Committee, we thank all of you who attended and supported the Tea and the honorees. Your generous donations, in honor of these remarkable women and the mission and vision of the WCC, serve to support the ongoing work, programs, and operations of the Woman's City Club. The 13th Tea produced a profit of \$1,036.

~ Laurie Frank, Chair
Feist tea Committee



Beth Sullebarger, WCC immediate past president, led off the presentation of this year's Feist Tea honorees by introducing Janet Buening, who preceded her as club president.

"Janet Buening is the model of a committed, conscientious, courageous, and creative community activist," Sullebarger said, "Professionally, she is a writer, editor, teacher, and trainer who has consistently worked for nonprofit agencies such as CET and Forward Movement because she wants to do good in the world."

For WCC, Buening upgraded our communications, redesigned the Bulletin, instituted weekly updates for members, and served as managing editor, chief copywriter, and designer of *Stirring the Pot – In the Kitchen and the Community*, and secured a three-page article about it in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. She currently chairs the WCC Program Committee and has long served on the National Speaker Forum and other committees.

Sullebarger said Janet has shown leadership in other community organizations. She was a founding member of the Hyde Park Neighborhood Council in 1979, served on its board for 44 years, and was its vice president in 2008-2010 and president in 2011-2013. "She fiercely fought to save Hyde Park Elementary School as a neighborhood school after it was abruptly closed in 2005 with no notice to the community." A renovated Hyde Park School reopened in 2012 following a seven-year campaign.



In 2012-13 as president of the Neighborhood Council, she prevented backlash when Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority bought several properties in Hyde Park and Mt. Lookout for Section 8 housing. Sullebarger quoted Buening as saying, "Having seen the ugliness in other communities, I wanted this to be a civil process. It's wrong to assume people of lesser means will be bad neighbors."



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Buening has been a tireless volunteer and leader in Catholic organizations — specifically Catholic Women and Catholic Residential Services. Her accomplishments kept the needs of disabled adults on the radar screen of the Archdiocese, helped establish the Cornerstone Loan Fund to provide low interest loans for affordable housing and the Continue with Confidence scholarship for women over 25.

“Janet has served on the board of the Cincinnati Editors Association, as a leader and trainer for Great Rivers Girl Scout Council, in many leadership positions for St. Mary’s Church and school, and as a grant writer for Queen City Balladeers,” Sullebarger said. “This really just cracks the surface of all the ways that Janet is a perfect example of a Feisty Woman.”



Cathy Bailey kindly assumed Susan Noonan’s place in introducing **Melissa Currence**. (Susan was home with her new great granddaughter.) An Ohio native all the way, Melissa grew up in Covedale. Her parents moved here from Virginia after marrying; almost all her relatives are still in Virginia. They call Melissa

their only Catholic Yankee! She married her husband Marc Younkin in 2020 after 19 years together, two houses and two dogs! Melissa likes to be absolutely sure before she acts!

She has always been a feisty leader – on student council in high school and as a newspaper columnist at Xavier University where she wrote an article on birth control encouraging men to use condoms! Hmmm, that was a little feisty! While still at Xavier, she started volunteering in Over-the-Rhine, after Buddy Gray was shot. During this period, Melissa did her feistiest thing yet – in 1998, she travelled to Georgia and protested at Ft. Benning against the School of Americas, which was training international military who later participated in undemocratic governments and committed human rights abuses!

Motivated by her experience volunteering on housing for the homeless, Melissa took her first job after college at Restoc which is now OTR Community Housing. They work to build and sustain a neighborhood that values low-income residents and benefits all in the community – another passion of Melissa’s. She joined LWV at age 18 as a freshman at Xavier because she wanted to know her community better!

Always looking to achieve and improve, Melissa moved on to Ohio State University where she got a Master of Arts in journalism and communication. While there, she was the lead reporter on a team of three who produced an investigative report in the student newspaper about handicapped accessibility on campus. After graduating,

Melissa went to work for Talbert House as a PR Specialist for six years. Not one to settle in a place for too long, Melissa found her next job at Greater Cincinnati Foundation and stayed there as Senior Digital Marketing Manager for seven years!

Then a blip in her life—a nine week stay at Children’s Hospital (not her thing)—and a quick exit to Artworks to become the Senior Director of Communications and Marketing. Championing their brand identity, telling their story, she had an impact on Artworks’ programming and fundraising results. Melissa stayed there a little over 3 years, then the wander bug hit again, and she made one more hop to P&G, where she is today as Communications Manager for P&G Professional North America! Her work there is all about innovation and driving breakthroughs in communications that delight consumers (that’s us), key opinion leaders, and influencers alike. Wow!

But her extra-career activities and civic leadership are what’s really helped shape Melissa’s passions. At the young age of 43, Melissa has held just about every job in LWV of the Cincinnati area, from raising \$160,000 for the mission of making democracy work to President in 2010-2011. Because of her local reputation, she was recruited and appointed to the Executive Board of LWV of the United States, where she was Chair of the Governance and Bylaws Committee (Have I mentioned Melissa LOVES Bylaws?) and other committees between 2018-2022. One of her proudest moments was serving as co-chair of the National LWV Young People’s Task Force because it provided guidance on how to bring more young people into getting involved with civics at the local and national levels.



Cathy Bailey (L) and
Melissa Currence



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In another of her organizations, the Cincinnati Association, a membership organization dedicated to understanding the issues facing our community and encouraging progress, she chaired the Constitution Review Committee, and went on to become VP and then President, 2017-2019 – I would bet she might be the youngest President they’ve had. And guess what she is doing for them now – Policy and Procedures – an organizational structure nerd! She really does love and understand all that stuff.

Her political science background pokes its head in now and then, and in 2020-2021, Melissa attended the inaugural class of Action Tank’s City Council Bootcamp to get a deeper understanding of city government systems and practices to successfully champion impactful policy changes that benefit all residents (which she continues to do with LWV). We’d all love to see her run for City Council!

Susan Noonan nominated both Melissa and me for Leadership Ohio last year; both of us were chosen and completed a year of learning about other cities in the state, and how state government works, and networked with people from every corner of the state. Melissa has been a recipient of Business Courier 2015 Class of Forty under 40, a 2012 YWCA Greater Cincinnati Rising Star and a first-place winner of the Public Relations Society for the website at Greater Cincinnati Foundation and for its Annual Report.



Feist Tea guests

As for the WCC and other feisty members having an impact on our community, Melissa said they have been a beacon for feisty women for more than a century, giving a home for suffragist work in the 1910’s. She is inspired by the legacy and hopes to continue to live up to those ideals. She looks up to former honorees, not only because they are feisty, but because they are leaders who can stand up to power and make changes. Our community needs this kind of leader, especially now with our democracy being threatened. Melissa hopes we all tap into our feisty sides and work on creating a just and sustainable community for all.

As for herself, she thinks her feistiness comes from being led by her values of inclusivity and learning, which guide her day-to-day, and when she gets feisty, it’s usually because of an injustice.... or because she is hungry!



Jan Seymour, WCC vice president of civic engagement, who described herself as a word person, concluded her introduction of **Denisha Porter** saying, “Here are my words for this young woman, going to the ABCs. She is amazing, authentic, beautiful, brave, caring and competent. She is Denisha, a feisty woman.



“So, how do I know this fantastic young woman?” Seymour started. “That’s where the WCC comes in. Early in my WCC membership, someone suggest-

ed I attend a meeting of All-In Cincinnati Equity Coalition. The motto of WCC is *Educate, Empower, Engage*. I think we

could add *Enrich* because that’s what being a part of All-In under Denisha’s leadership has done for me.

Of course, I did attend an All-In meeting. There I found a group of folks, committing to work for racial equity. All-In was being led by an ad-hoc group from GCF (Greater Cincinnati Foundation), United Way and Interact for Health. After about a year or so an executive director was hired – Denisha Porter.

A lot of Denisha’s time has been COVID-bound. Dare I say bound? You wouldn’t know bound. Zoom meetings of All-In, attended by 40 to 90, have addressed issues of health, housing, economic mobility, education and justice, attempting to create change toward greater equity for Black women. And, once again, policy and systemic changes too numerous to enumerate.”



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“Denisha represents the best of Cincinnati’s young Black women leaders,” Seymour said. “She is a product of Walnut Hills High School, Miami University (B.A. in microbiology), and Wright State (Master of Public Health).”

Denisha originally thought that she might want to go into medicine but somewhere along the way she chose, rather than diseases and illness, to work for health. Porter’s accomplishments as the director of health promotion and worksite wellness at the Cincinnati Health Department were, “as they say, too numerous to list” Seymour said. Porter developed policies to promote breast feeding, policies to protect residents in public housing from second-hand smoke and to get fresh produce into neighborhoods declared food-deserts, “and another 400 location-specific policies and environmental changes in Ohio and Kentucky. You’ll be glad to know I am not listing those.”

Porter serves on many boards (Interact for Health, Chatfield College, Citizens of the World Charter Schools, Southwest Ohio Regional Workforce Innovation), and advisory boards

(Center for Population Health at Xavier University, Avondale Choice Endowment, Health Policy Institute of Ohio Equity), and is a member of Landsman’s Children and Families Council. She was selected for the 2021 Leadership Cincinnati and graduated from the Urban League of Southwest Ohio 2019 Urban Leader’s Institute and the 2011 Community Leaders Institute of the Center for Clinical and Translation Science and Training.

She has received many awards, among them from the *Cincinnati Business Courier* (2019 Forty under 40 Award), *The Cincinnati Herald* (2018 Nefertiti Award), and the City of Cincinnati Mayor’s 2015 Employee of the Year Award.



Denisha Porter and Jan Seymour

~ Jo-Ann Huff Albers



(L-R) Mark Shannon, Sister Judy Tensing and Marge Davis



Jeff Dey, WCC President



Feist Tea guests



Denisha Porter, honoree, with Eileen Cooper Reed (L) and Dr. Camille Jones (R)



(L-R) Laurie Frank and Jan Seymour

Feist Tea Photographs by Harriet Kaufman