

BY KATHARINE GILBERT



Icebreaker with food, drinks, music and time for catching up with other Hibernian friends from around the U.S.

These events could definitely be called our meet and greet networking gathering for the AOH and LAOH. All went off without a hitch with no surprises. Our Pittsburgh hosts did an amazing job with all events.

**I** Some Associations Conventions are meet and greet and network gatherings. Did the AOH / LAOH have a similar theme or were there some surprises?

Our conventions are a little of both. For the ladies the convention starts at the beginning of the week for anyone who wants to come out and volunteer in the St. Brigid Charity Project which this year was to help two charities.

Center for Victims of Domestic Violence and/or The Red Door Kitchen for homeless women. Both with women supporting women. It was an eye opening experience for us.

The meeting started on Thursday with a full agenda that went through to Saturday.

In the evenings, events are planned for both men and women starting with the

**2** For LAOH members, was there a separate program or do both...AOH and LAOH have the same program offerings at the Convention?

The AOH and LAOH each have separate meetings. We come together only once for a brief joint meeting. The work of the order is similar but not everything we do is discussed outside our meetings and the same for the men.

**3** Did LAOH members participate in discussions regarding AOH women membership with AOH members or separately among LAOH members?

The Ladies did not have any discussions pertaining to the vote that was to be taken by the AOH allowing women to join the men's organization. Since this was not part of our agenda and pertained to the men, there was no need for us to discuss.

**4** Is it too early to come to a consensus or organizational point of view regarding women joining AOH or has the LAOH taken a position?

As I explained in our conversation before the convention, I did not feel it would be proper to discuss something that had not happened. I wanted to wait and see what the vote would be when it reached the floor, but I can tell you now what my feelings have been since this issue came up last year at the PA State Convention in Philadelphia.

Although it was coming across as a MERGER, it was certainly not a MERGER. After reading information sent out to the men, it became apparent that what was being proposed was to change the AOH charter to allow women all rights and privileges of AOH men.

The comparison was being made to other organizations where men and women are equal members such as the Elks.

So let's step back for some history and I promise to keep it brief. The Ladies started out in 1894 as The Daughters of Erin and quickly grew along with a name change to the Ladies Auxiliary, Ancient Order of Hibernians (LAAOH), in 2004, the organization became INC hence why we are now the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians Inc.

I say all this because there is over 125 years of history to our organization, so to suggest that by allowing women to join the men puts them in the same category as the Elks—I beg to differ and by allowing women to join the AOH it makes our history and years of good works seem minimal.

We are a strongly established women's organization of practicing Catholics who

are Irish or of Irish descent through either by parents or adoption or wife or mother of an AOH member, and/or mother of a Jr. Division member. To have a proposal drawn up to make changes to their charter from the 1800 — without giving more thought to the backlash or ramifications — seems like a big undertaking that would cause a separation among the groups of men and women Hibernians who work so well together.

After the vote was taken in Pittsburgh on Saturday, the consensus of the men in attendance was to leave things the way they are and not accept women.

I had no doubt that the men in our State, Counties and Divisions agreed to not accept the proposal and to continue to work with their counterparts in the LAOH.

We appreciate having that working relationship and personally I thank them all for not allowing this to pass at this time.

**5** Overall, were you pleased with the results of the Convention and on a final note, has LAOH been asked to participate in Irish Government plans to encourage Americans to retire in Ireland?

I am truly pleased with the outcome of the National Convention held in Pennsylvania and for all the hard work of the members from Pittsburgh who hosted a fabulous convention at the Wyndham Grand Hotel. As for your last question, LAOH has not been involved up to this point. We hope to work closer with AOH on immigration issues in the future.