

Make Shift Coffee House

2017 Civvy Award Comments



In 2017, Make Shift Coffee House was nominated for an American Award for Civic Collaboration, also known as a Civvy Award. We were a finalist. Below are comments that people made in support of our nomination.

I recently participated in the Make Shift Coffee House event in Hallowell, Maine. The event was filled with people supporting the Republican, Libertarian, Democratic, and Independent parties. It was a first for me to be in a room with so much political diversity.

Craig Freshley was masterful in facilitating and successfully guiding us to be engaged in an interactive, civil, productive dialogue across party lines. Surprisingly we discovered common ground! I left feeling that we had much to learn from each other if we were going to move forward in our current political situation. I am committed to supporting cross party lines dialogue and will be planning a coffeehouse event in my community.

-Anonymous

I had the good fortune to attend a Make Shift Coffee House held at Yarmouth High School, last spring. Participants traveled significant distances within Maine to attend. Upon arrival, everyone was made to feel very welcome.

I was delighted to hear the question we were to address as a group: "What should the role of government be in our communities and in our family life?" (I wrote it down) A great question! I was then struck by how facilitator Craig Freshly sensitively helped people tell how their upbringing and other life events influenced their response to that question. Sharing personal stories diffused much of the emotion surrounding the issues discussed. We were better able to hear one another with compassion. We were able to lay down our "weapons" of position, politics, and emotion for the evening. -Rev Priscilla

I wish to nominate the Make Shift Coffee House for an American Civic Collaboration Award. I attended a Make Shift Coffee House gathering earlier this month and was very impressed. There were approximately 25 to 30 people attending and the atmosphere was very welcoming and relaxed. There was lovely food spread out on a table against the wall. A man and woman played the guitar and sang in another corner providing a muted musical backdrop. There were tables spread out around the open area with cards on top offering suggestions of various topics one might wish to talk about. People were engaged in conversation and the mediator, Craig Freshley greeted us as we entered. He explained the

topic and format briefly. Our topic that night was “Why do Democrats and Republicans see things so differently?” Much to my surprise and delight there were conservatives and liberals there.

Craig mediated the group discussion with warmth, non-threatening but probing questions and respect. People stood or sat at the tables and shared their experiences, thoughts and feelings. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. There was time after the group discussion to continue talking to people.

I was sorry to have to leave with my friend after the discussion. I wanted to approach some of the people with more conservative views than mine.

I am very heartened to have this mode of interaction available in our area of Augusta Maine in Kennebec County. I will promote it in any way I can. I plan to attend another Make Shift Coffee House at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine next month.

I hope Make Shift Coffee House wins this award because it will help further the objectives of civil discourse that are so sorely needed at this time in our country. -Judith Johnson

Attending the Make Shift Coffee House after the past presidential election allowed me to both vent my own frustrations and better understand others' points of view. Specifically, the atmosphere of mutual respect that accompanied our dialogue left me with a feeling of empathy and insight toward individuals and viewpoints that I'd thought were “evil” and intolerable before the meeting.

Make Shift Coffee House made me realize that political discussions are worth having, because most Americans really do want what's best for everyone. My experience there also encouraged me to read – and talk to others – about beliefs that are different from my own, without feeling immediately threatened or repulsed by them. -Emma

Ever since I have known Craig Freshly – going on 40 years now – he has been an inspiration and source of good in his communities. With his charisma he has the ability to get people together to talk about their lives and thoughts in an environment of openness and free of judgment. He has always had this effect on people.

And now he is providing a platform with which struggling, frustrated, confused, bitter people can reach across the aisle and talk openly with other-minded folks about their political, ideological and personal fears. It is an amazing accomplishment and one that seems to have found quite a following in his part of Maine.

I recommend Craig and his Coffee House for the Civvy Award unconditionally because he and his platform need the exposure and financial support to be able to bring more people together in hopes of reuniting the deeply divided nation. -Jim Martin

I live in a wonderful community, with a rich variety of people, in terms of politics, lifestyle and religious practice. Until recently I felt like we all lived in relative harmony. In the last year, so many of us, including me, felt alienated from each other, and isolated because of the political climate.

I also felt hopeless about it, and discouraged, wondering what could be done. I felt afraid to speak up, worried I would alienate my neighbors and community members. When Craig Freshley began hosting the Make Shift Coffee Houses, frankly we all thought he was way too optimistic. How could he possibly bring Democrats and Republicans together in one room with so much animosity in our midst? The courage and determination amazed us all.

I have been so heartened by the success of his efforts, and his ongoing determination. Others have joined in, making it truly a community initiative. The Coffee Houses are expanding into other communities in our state, and I would love to see it continue to grow.

The Make Shift Coffee House is a brilliant example of collaboration. I am inspired and encouraged by this growing community effort. It feels like the essence of patriotism and love of our country. -Katharine Hildebrandt

In our current political climate, I see people from all political stripes feeling betrayed, despairing, angry, disconnected, resigned, afraid. They just don't understand how "those people" could possibly want something that is so bad for our country. Some of them want to understand others, but they don't know who to ask. And even if they did, they don't know what to ask.

Many of us are just not accustomed to asking strangers (or even friends and family!) questions about their deeply held beliefs. Despite our best intentions, we come across as judgmental or defensive. We project "How can you possibly think that?" even if we don't say it out loud. We are terrified that being curious equates to letting go of our own beliefs.

That's why we need spaces like the Make Shift Coffee House. Spaces that show us how to be curious yet unafraid. Spaces that strive for balanced viewpoints, not echo chambers. Spaces with structure to guard against grandstanding. And along with all that, we need spaces that remind us how two people on opposite sides of the political spectrum can both love that same classic rock song on the guitar.

Building vibrant, connected communities is, I believe, the healthiest path to a robust, peaceful future, and Craig's Make Shift Coffee House model and vision bring me hope and an entry point to get there. -Anonymous