

## **For Obama backers, the work continues** **TONY KURDZUK/THE STAR-LEDGER**

Posted by [mrangele](#) January 24, 2009 22:45PM

In the run-up to the presidential election, Cynthia Lamy worked the phones and knocked on doors in Pennsylvania on behalf of Barack Obama.

With her man now in the White House, Lamy might be expected to relax a bit. Instead, the 48-year-old Maplewood woman is as charged up as ever, eager to take up the president's call -- first voiced during the campaign -- for a new spirit of volunteerism in America.



Pamela Dixon plans to speak to children about the impact of the historic election .

She's among some 50 former Obama campaign volunteers from Maplewood and South Orange who have maintained contact with each other with the aim of lending their time to a variety of causes, from community organizing and campaigns focused on advancing Obama's agenda to bread-and-butter tasks that serve the needy.

"Everyone has been moved to action by this call," said Lamy, who works for a New York City-based anti-poverty agency, the Robin Hood Foundation. "There's been a lot of chatter, and people are excited."

In the afterglow of a still remarkable inauguration that brought well over 1 million people to the nation's capital last week, Lamy's continued activism is a story now playing out all over the country.

With a contact list of more than 13 million e-mail addresses of those who backed his presidency, and a growing social network tied together through Facebook, YouTube and other internet links, Obama emerged from the electoral contest with a grassroots organization of startling potential and is making plans to tap it, even after the election.

"There are a lot of people that got involved in this election inspired by President Obama," said Newark Mayor Cory Booker, who was a co-chairman of Obama's campaign in New Jersey. "What Obama has said quite clearly is that we need everyone to stay involved and continue to push and continue to work."

Even before his inauguration, Obama set up a group called Organizing for America and told supporters in a video announcement: "The movement you've built is too important to stop growing now."

Some have taken to calling the group "Obama 2.0." The entity will operate from Democratic National Committee headquarters and will be independent, although political analysts see it as a political organization already putting together the framework for a 2012 re-election campaign. In its first steps, though, the group is being used to spark greater volunteerism.

Hugh Price, former president of the National Urban League and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said the organization could represent a potent political and social force for Obama.

"It's an army in reserve," he observed.

Price, who is on the faculty of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University as a visiting professor, called Obama's election a transformation of politics in the United States, driven by a hunger, especially among young people, for "someone to talk straight, be forthright, and be frank about the challenges we face."

In the process, the Obama campaign "built a monster machine like nobody has ever seen," Price said. He called Obama supporters a legion of true believers.

"They believe and hope in ways we haven't seen," said Price.

Political scientist Ingrid Reed, director of the New Jersey project at the Eagleton Institute of Politics, said that while such an organization could be a strong force -- enabling the new administration to directly appeal for support on difficult issues -- sustaining it could be problematic now that the election is over.

"How do people stay involved? You can be involved in electing somebody and people will really be engaged. But I'm puzzled how you maintain and engage people," she said.

Others suggest technology will be the glue that holds it together.

"You're seeing an administration that is communicating directly with the American people in ways no administration has ever communicated before," noted Jim Leach, a visiting professor at the Woodrow Wilson School who served 15 terms in Congress representing eastern Iowa. "This presidency is the first presidency of the internet."

Leach, a Republican who crossed party lines to support Obama, observed that the new president is beginning his term on an incredible amount of good will.

"You have the sense that he's propelled by millions of Americans that have identified with him," he said.

The contrast between the gloom of the economy and the possibility of better things ahead has given many a feeling of hope, creating the desire to get more involved, said John R. Aiello, a Rutgers University professor and expert in social and organizational psychology.

"That can translate into the volunteerism that is being asked for, and community work that is part of Obama's background," said Aiello. "He has a torch that can lead to all kinds of opportunities for young people, and there is a huge potential for channeling those energies -- with kids in particular."

It's kids whom Pamela Dixon most wants to reach.

The 47-year-old Sayreville resident was in the crowd on the National Mall to watch Obama take the oath of office Tuesday. Dixon, who is black, called it a transformational experience, one that has inspired her to "strive to make this world a better place for others."

A court reporter with no public-speaking experience, Dixon said she'd like to address groups of African-American children and teens, motivating them to set their goals high and to work through the obstacles that life places before them. She's not sure yet if she will reach out to schools or community groups, but she said she knows she can no longer sit on the sidelines.

"I feel like I have an obligation," she said. "I didn't go the inauguration to say, 'Oh, that was nice.' It's bigger than that. It can't be business as usual."

Sean McGee, 35, of Colts Neck, who was also in Washington with his family for the inauguration, spent Monday at a high school in the capital, volunteering to put together care packages for the troops in Iraq, and wants to do more.

Recalling the crowds that stretched to the horizon, he said: "When you are among people like that, and you can't move, and there is nothing but pride, it's a call to action. I don't know about politics, but we want to give back and I definitely want to be a part of something bigger."

Here in New Jersey, the state's biggest food bank, the Community Food Bank of New Jersey in Hillside, saw more than 75 volunteers sign up for an event last week through Obama's new volunteerism website, Renew America Together, according to Faye Kuhn, the agency's director of volunteer services.

"I don't know them well enough to know if they'll come back, but they do seem enthusiastic," Kuhn said. "Did they sign up because Obama said to get involved? Absolutely."

She said the food bank's managers impressed upon the new recruits that volunteerism should be a year-round effort, not a holiday dalliance.

"I think that was the point the president was trying to drive home, too," Kuhn said.

For Lamy, volunteerism has a broad definition. It could mean packing items for distribution at a food bank or helping to build a house through Habitat for Humanity. But it also could mean working to ensure that communities benefit from the new administration's pledge to spend heavily on infrastructure, including new schools.

"Right now as a group we're trying to figure out what our goals are," Lamy said. "We're still in the data-collection mode, trying to figure out what the needs are in our area."



PATTI SAPONE/THE

STAR-LEDGER Wendy Adi-Darko, 29, left, and Holly Schneider, 27, both with the Second Baptist Church volunteer their time to work on a house for Habitat For Humanity. Volunteers from Rutgers Law School, Newark and the Second Baptist Church Roselle both contributed to building the home in Newark.

Categories: [Newark Live](#), [Statehouse](#)

Great article.

*In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!*

---Karl Marx

Posted on 01/25/09 at 1:37AM

**shalub says...**

the 2nd Babtist Church ? what was wrong with the first one ?

Posted on 01/25/09 at 6:44AM

**GeorgeSchrub says...**

Hugh Price, former president of the National Urban League and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said the organization could represent a potent political and social force for Obama.

"It's an army in reserve," he observed.

And that's exactly the point. Kind of like Hitler's SA. A marxist coup in the wings. And use the least politically sophisticated and least intelligent groups you can find to be your foot soldiers.

Posted on 01/25/09 at 6:59AM

**barrelboy08 says...**

The "marxist" Obama regime includes a tax dodger and a slew of Clinton admin retreads. How is that change? He shows his real priorities by trying to free the Gitmo war criminals to get out and attack us.

Posted on 01/25/09 at 7:30AM

**kra23mer says...**

When you have time on your hands you can do stuff like volunteer. More people would probably volunteer for many different endeavors if they didn't have full time jobs etc.

Posted on 01/25/09 at 7:45AM

**chro079 says...**

When do they break out the brown shirts? How about the Hitler, sorry, Obama youth start parading about? Do you mean to tell me that these folks were waiting for Obama to inspire them? Are they such a set of mice that they could not perform these acts prior to be hypnotize by the new Houdini. Maybe he can enlist the released detainees from Gitmo he his troops. Those folks are very good a suppressing the opposition.

One week in office and BO has done more for terrorist and abortionist then the American citizen good luck.