

Moms offer advice for D.C., politely

By [THERESA WALKER](#)

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It all started during a May evening, nearly two years ago, when the hors d'oeuvres and the wine had Debbie Devine's guests feeling mellow.

Debbie was hosting about 20 women at her Newport Beach home, an annual get-together that she says is "for gals I really like."

Usually, the noshing is followed by inviting each gal pal to chat about one thing they learned in the past year, and one thing they hoped to accomplish in the coming year. But with the 2008 presidential campaign in full swing, the conversation took a different turn, one that led Debbie and friend Michelle Tingler down an unexpected road.

Maybe it was the wine, or maybe it was the glow of her outdoor fireplace that made her think the women would warm to a topic known to put the freeze on the best of friendships.

"Who are you going to vote for and why?" Debbie asked.

Most of the women at the party, who ranged in age from about 35 to 55, were Republican.

Actually, as Michelle recalls, only two were Democrats – and she was one of them. By the time it got to be her turn – last – she was the *only* Democrat left at the party. "I kind of lost it," she says now. "I said I am NOT voting for a Republican and here's why ..."

They say the conversation that night was lively but respectful, more opinionated than angry. It was so energizing that eight of the women continued exchanging e-mails right up to the election.

When Sen. John McCain picked Sarah Palin as his GOP running mate, "that's when things got fun," says Debbie, who loved Palin's convention speech but not her interview with Katie Couric.

There were e-mails about Obama being a terrorist or a Muslim, and not being an American citizen.

"We were going tit for tat," says Michelle, the lone Obama supporter in the e-mail chain until a Democratic friend of Debbie's from Wisconsin joined in.

"We found the truth would lie somewhere in between."

Then Obama was elected, his inauguration made history, and life moved on.

Except, Michelle felt deflated. She missed that earnest engagement and debate. And she was bothered by the ever-widening partisan divide and bad manners on Capitol Hill.

"Now what?" she asked herself.

When it came to changing the nature of political discourse in America she wondered "what can a mom who's raising three kids do?"

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About a year after that dinner, Michelle was on a beach in Hawaii, on vacation, when she had a Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland movie moment: Maybe two moms could rally a bunch of other moms and maybe we could lead by example!

She drew a picture in the sand: a heart encircled by concentric rings, like a bull's-eye on a target. It was the logo for the Web site she wanted to start. And her friend, Debbie, was the other mom who starred in her big idea to change small-minded politics.

As different as they are in their political preferences and their upbringing, Debbie and Michelle, both 42, share many bedrock family values.

Michelle grew up in Rochester, Mich., a suburb of Detroit that she describes as a sweet little railroad town back then. She and her younger brother were raised by a single dad, a developer and contributed to the eventual growth of Rochester. He's a Republican.

The family ate dinner together every night and the kids had to bring a newspaper article to the table to talk about. If they said they were bored, they'd get to shovel snow. He'd make big pots of spaghetti and play Monopoly with his kids to keep them close to home.

Debbie, who also has a brother, grew up in Newport Beach. Her parents are old-school Republicans, she says, whose home became a polling site during elections. Every night, at family dinner, they'd talk about what was going on in their lives, or what was in the news.

She went to USC, her mom's alma mater, and majored in international relations. Her dad, a Stanford alum and former Navy SEAL, is a landscape architect. Debbie says she was more liberal as a young adult, "until I got that first paycheck" and noticed the tax bite.

Before turning their focus to raising their children, both their lives were all about communication on a broad scale – Michelle as an advertising executive and Debbie as a journalist working for Telemundo in Chicago and then as an operations manager for CNN.

It wasn't hard for Michelle to convince her friend to partner in the Web site that would be the cyberspace equivalent of Debbie's backyard party.

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O-MAMA.com – and that's O as in opinionated – is a place for moms to talk about the news of the day and the social and political hot buttons of the hour.

Debbie, who is divorced with two children, updates the links and writes the news blog and on-site articles. Michelle does the copy editing, the marketing, and, until sponsors come on board, the financing.

Launched in the fall, O-MAMA features chat forums and discussion groups for Republican moms and Democratic moms, and moms in a dozen other roles. Visitors are encouraged to "cross the aisle" and join the conversation in whichever forum interests them.

Other features include a news blog, inspiring quotes, a comic strip and, soon to come, a place to buy stuff that they say will only be Made In America. There's also the "Kitchen Table Talk" – chats that Michelle and Debbie videotape at Michelle's home in the hills of San Clemente.

Mainly through grass roots networking, traffic on the site is growing slowly but surely, they say. The O-MAMA fan page on Facebook has attracted more than 500 fans so far.

Ultimately, they hope that the common sense moms often employ in day-to-day family decisions will serve as an example to the gridlocked politicians on Capitol Hill.

"We're saying, 'do your job'," Debbie says. "We're going to run our houses and you can run the big stuff."

Just do it."

But play nice, like we do, they add.

"She's a Republican and I'm a Democrat, but we love each other," Michelle says.

"We're friends and we respect each other to the core. Maybe we as moms can break through."

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