“Leadership Legacy Rooted in PALP Paved Way For Female Leaders”
PALP Alumni Spotlight
by Ruth Rudy, PALP II

This article was created and shared in 2015, it is worthy of a recreation and resharing.

The decade of the 1970’s was just beginning and while recuperating from major surgery, I read in the newspaper about a rural leadership program being offered by the Pennsylvania State University. It was funded through the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This was not the first major surgery in my lifetime and I felt I needed to become more productive with my life than being a housewife and a business partner with my husband.

Even though I had three children at home, I applied to be accepted into the Kellogg program. To my surprise and dismay, I received a letter in regard to my inquiry that only men were being accepted into the course. The letter also advocated that my husband should apply to become a member of the program. He filled out the necessary paper work and became a member of the very first class.

Spouses were allowed to accompany the first year participants to the “Libertyville” session and I went along with him thinking that this would be my first and last chance to participate in a seminar of the program. The following year, I again saw an article in the newspaper about the program and much to my surprise, women were being admitted.

Never being an individual to give up, I applied even though my husband was already accepted into the second year of the program to become a community leader. We were called PALPERS which was an acronym for PA Public Affairs Leadership Program- RULE’s predecessor (this is not to be confused with the word pauper even though I felt like a pauper sometimes at that stage of my life).

I started as a member of the 2nd class of the Public Affairs Leadership Program with dreams of becoming a township supervisor or a school board member, as we were developing a 100 unit mobile home court on our farm at the time. I’m sure you can visualize the trouble something of that nature can stir up in a community.

A conflict of interest seemed to develop in our family during the year when we both were participants, as we tried to raise a family, run a business, and juggle both of our schedules. Somehow, we managed.
Disappointment struck again, as I applied but was not accepted into the 2nd & 3rd year of the program. It was pointed out to me that too much of an investment would be put into one family if I continued in the course. However, I must state that my one year participation in the PALP group gave me the insight, skills, and gumption that enabled me to become a leader beyond my wildest dreams.

After both of us participated in the program, my husband and I put our heads together, became leaders of the Democratic Party of Centre County and branched out from that point.

I was elected Centre County Prothonotary and Clerk of Courts in 1975 and held the position for seven years. In 1982, I was elected to represent the people of the 171st district in the Pennsylvania General Assembly. I served in that position for 14 years. During that time period, I obtained permanent funding from the Commonwealth by legislation to help fund the RULE program. After an unsuccessful campaign as a candidate for the 5th Congressional District in 1996, I served the Democratic National Institute as a representative to Yemen in 1997.

I have attended the presidential inaugural ceremonies of Carter and Clinton, met President Obama several times and visited the White House at least eight times. I also attended 11 Democratic National Conventions (nine of them as a delegate), had two hats that were made and worn by me at these conventions enshrined at the Smithsonian Institute, Museum of American History, served as President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Democratic Women, President of the National Federation of Democratic Women and started my tenure on the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

I served 28 years as an elected member of the Democratic National Committee. The DNC is the governing body of the Democratic Party of the United States and is the highest party position that can be obtained unless you are an officer. I have served as a member of the Executive Committee on the DNC, and was the elected Chair of the Women’s Caucus, having defeated the late Congresswoman Bella Abzug, N. Y. who was my opponent.

I will be forever grateful to be given the opportunity to participate in the PALP program for one year as the course gave me the courage to dream about a larger community involvement than township supervisor.

RULE and its predecessor sibling PALP program have yielded over 700 alumni. Whether a recent alum, or one that attended RULE decades ago, RULE experiences stay relevant and resonant.

3/2021