

# MomsRising turns mothers into advocates

BY TODD LUCK  
THE CHRONICLE

Online organizing that's turned many busy mothers into advocates is taking local involvement to a new level as MomsRising held its first Winston-Salem chapter meeting.

The meeting was held last week at Highland Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall, which had a large space that housed the meeting for the moms and supervised activities for their children. There were even advocacy-themed coloring books available for the kids. MomsRising tries to help women squeeze activism advocacy into their frantic lives and constantly advocates for a variety of issues.

Earlier that day, Beth Messersmith, the organization's state campaign director, was among those hand-delivering storybooks to state lawmakers that collected the stories from families impacted by early childhood education. The lawmakers knew to expect them because they'd been hearing from constituents on the issue, due to an email call-to-action that MomsRising sent out that morning.

Email alerts, urging women to contact their lawmakers on various issues, is a frequent tactic for the group.

"We want to make sure that every time there's an opportunity that our voices can be heard for families here in our state and our nation, that we put those out there for folks so they can take action," said Messersmith.

The group also regularly gathers the stories of people affected by the issues they advocate for. Messersmith said that they plan to deliver a storybook with stories about the need for paid sick leave to Raleigh next week, complete with little rubber ducks to go with the theme that paid sick days "keep families afloat."

Started in 2006, MomsRising has 1 million



Beth Messersmith talks about MomsRising's work at the General Assembly during a meeting held last week at Highland Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall.

members nationwide and 42,000 in North Carolina. It works on a multitude of issues, including living wage, education, health-care and gun safety. The paid staff in North Carolina is small, with Messersmith putting in 30 hours a week, and two others who put in five hours weekly, so the group is dependent on volunteers and members.

"I had no idea you accomplished so much with so little and I want to congratulate you on that," said Diana Gray, who has been responding to MomsRising's emails for several years.

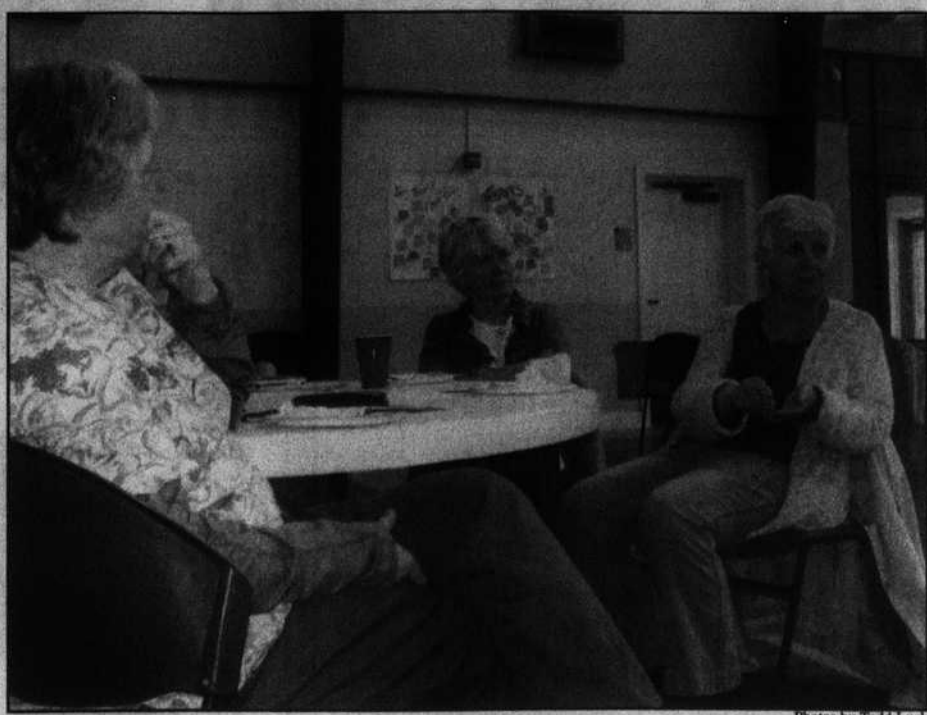
Gray was one of dozens of attendees who came out for the meeting. They ranged in age from senior citizens to young moms. Some were longtime advocates, others only became politically involved recently.

"I wasn't a very political person before this administration," said Leslie Wakeford, who added she was just "coasting along" when Barack Obama was president.

Messersmith said MomsRising has seen a surge of new interest since the election, as have many other advocacy groups. The women there listed many issues they were passionate about, including

stronger gun laws, protecting the Affordable Care Act, and the high cost of quality childcare, which they said can cost more than college tuition now.

Messersmith, after



Diana Gray (far right) speaks during the first meeting of MomsRising in Winston-Salem last week at Highland Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall.

recording what issues attendees where interested in, asked what they wanted to do as a next step. The

group enthusiastically asked for training sessions on advocacy and how the General Assembly works,

which will be featured in future meetings.



Photo by Tevin Stinson

In honor of Bookmarks' new location on West Fourth Street, children's author Megan Bryant added two new verses to her book 'Dump Truck Duck.'

## Bookmarks celebrates expansion

BY TEVIN STINSON  
THE CHRONICLE

In recognition of National Independent Bookstore Day last Saturday, Bookmarks held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new bookstore downtown. The expansion to the new location on at 634 West Fourth St. will also include Bookmarks offices, Foothills Café and an event and gathering space. Construction on the building is expected to be complete later this summer.

During the celebration, award winning children's author Megan Bryant led a construction-themed story time with local children. In honor of Bookmarks new home, Bryant added two

new verses and illustrations to her book "Dump Truck Duck." Bookmarks operations director Jamie Rogers Southern said she was proud to see how the nonprofit has grown over the years.

"We've grown from a one-woman team to hosting one of the largest book festivals in the Carolinas. I'm incredibly proud to be a part of the team that makes up Bookmarks."

Bookmarks, she said is a literary arts nonprofit organization that fosters a love of reading and writing in the community. Bookmarks reaches more than 7,000 students annually.

For more information visit [www.bookmarksnc.org](http://www.bookmarksnc.org).



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