Making New Friends at the International Conference

by Reem Iversen
Welcome to Florida International Club



Reem Iversen (left) with Kathryn Bessemer (middle) and Gilda Schwalb (right)

On Tuesday, June 12, I took to the road to join my new friends from the International Women's Club of Philadelphia at their end-of-year business luncheon. The luncheon that took place at the White Dog Café in the quaint town of Haverford, PA, was attended by approximately 65 cheerful members and me. Though this was my first visit to this sister club, I was received with the sort of warm welcome that made me feel immediately at home.

No sooner I walked through the door of the restaurant, Kathryn started introducing me to all members present. Everyone was friendly and welcoming. They were all curious about who I was, my country of origin, and where I lived. But, when they heard that I was a member of Welcome to Florida International Club (in Naples, FL), they became

even more inquisitive: they all wanted to know where I met my hosts, Gilda and Kathryn? Well, I first met these two gracious hosts at the 15th Biennial WCI International Conference in Washington, D.C., this past May.

The company and food were superb, but most importantly I had the opportunity to hear Gilda's report about WCI's role and its relationship with the club in Philadelphia. Gilda's talk at the request of the club's President, Helga Ruus-Neubert, was both inspiring and informative.

The main message of her report was that IWCP is a sister club of many others like it in the U.S. and across the world, and that together we are all under the umbrella of Welcome Clubs International (WCI). Gilda eloquently stressed WCI's function in building bridges between the various sister clubs in their aim to foster camaraderie among women, which, as a consequence, empowers women. As Gilda later expressed to me, our get-together on June 12 was putting the mission of WCI into action: bringing women from sister clubs together in friendship and understanding.

In addition, Gilda gave a summary of the various events at the 15th Biennial WCI International Conference and showed the beautiful gifts we all received as guests of the hosting club, Welcome to Washington International Club (WTW). It was clear from the reaction of those attending that before her report many were unaware of the central role WCI plays as an international organization that provides support and resources to individual member clubs. Among the various resources are the ability to participate in a WCI conference, and to have access to the organization's website to read about what other clubs are doing in the Sister Club Newsletter and The Link magazine.

As for me, the message I took away from my participation in the Conference and the luncheon is that through friendship and diversity we grow kinder and stronger!





