

Speaking with Debby Jones, President of CMC September 2020

Interviewed by Danny Bernstein

Debby Jones was interviewed December 2017 by Becky Smucker. As it is our custom to interview all incoming president, the Communications Committee thought it was important to talk to Debby again.

Debby Jones, President of CMC, is an active can-do type of person.

Right now, Debby is still technically at work. She's worked for the Marietta City Schools (Georgia) her whole career. Marietta is a district about 15 miles north of Atlanta.



Debby, a native of Atlanta, began as an elementary school teacher. Then she taught in a special education program in a high school and worked her way to director of special education and assistant principal. She moved to the central office to work on policy and planning. Then she started presiding at disciplinary hearings.

Her title is Executive Director of Student Support. Debby deals with every aspect of a student's school life except for curriculum. She's supervised nursing, social work and suicide prevention and intervention. When she started this position, she was both the athletic director and in charge of disciplinary hearings. She dealt with parents when their child was recommended for expulsion and when they didn't make the baseball team. She had to go to all the sports events.

Federal law requires that if a student can be expelled for ten days or more, he or she needs a hearing. Debby presides over these hearings. She's called a judge, although she doesn't have a law degree. Parents can bring in an attorney if they want, though Debby feels there's no need for one. She makes the decision about the student's immediate future after hearing all sides.

Right now, she's not retired. She was supposed to train her replacement this past semester, but the pandemic halted these plans. Since right now the Marietta City school system is completely online, there are no disciplinary problems – at least not at school. So there's no need for her work.

“Very few people can do this work. As soon as I train someone, I'm done.”

Her CMC involvement

Debby and her husband, David, have a house in Black Mountain. Debby has been a member of CMC since 2015.

“My role as a Vice President was very unusual in some capacity.” Debby had not been on the CMC Council beforehand when she was asked if she would consider running for Vice President. Past presidents Randy Fluharty and Barbara Morgan filled in her knowledge of the Council and committees.

“I don’t understand why people don’t want to do this work (be on the Council), Debby says.”

Her primary job as VP was to plan the annual dinner – the venue, menu, and speaker. It’s a big job.

“I feel that there are a lot of people who use the club but do nothing. Most people hike and go home. There are so many opportunities to volunteer, on a quarterly work crew as an example. Members can even volunteer to give out name tags at events. I find that the same people are involved over and over again.”

Different members plan other events. Catherine and Les Love work on the Spring Social. Brenda Worley and the hiking committee plan the hike leaders’ dinner.

“I’m starting a monthly column in the eNews about various activities in the club,” Debby said.

Hiking during the Pandemic

Debby became president of CMC in January 2020. For the past ten years or so, presidents have organized an all-day planning meeting in January, and she did the same.

“We talked about diversity again in terms of age, equity, families coming out on the trail. We didn’t create a real plan - goals more than plans. The council has goals, but the committees have plans,” she explains.

Committees should ask for what they need. Debby can’t think of any request that have been turned down. CMC even subsidizes the annual dinner.

Then the pandemic happened. What was Debby’s reaction as an individual and a hiker?

“I was nervous. It’s an unknown – we didn’t know how bad it was going to be. We found out it was worse than we thought. I was already staying in Black Mountain. Being outside was the best place to be.”

Debby kept hiking by herself and with a few friends. CMC closed hiking very early. “We are a public leading organization and we need to set an example,” she says.

There were no guidelines except for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. “We needed to set an example.”

She sent an email to the CMC council explaining that the best course of action was to close hiking. At the same time, she participated in biweekly meetings with ATC and A.T. maintaining clubs such as Smoky Mountains Hiking Club.

Before the CMC Council reopened group hiking again, it checked with a lawyer, the same lawyer who reviewed our previous waiver; the lawyer is not a volunteer. He suggested adding a Covid-specific waiver.

“The new guidelines are working,” Debby says. “The leader can see who is coming on the hike and maybe assess their ability level. I hope it doesn’t have to stay this way. The new regulations are not a whole package; we can adapt as we go.”

“The club has to set an example.” And when does Debby think we can go back to our past way of group hiking?

“When cases stop increasing and/or we have a vaccine. CMC members are patient and supportive, even if I feel that some people are not happy about the guidelines.”

Favorite hike

Interviewer: If you want to take a friend on a hike, what hike would you choose? To make this question relevant, assume that she/he hikes at the same level as you.

For a day hike, Debby would choose Charlies Bunion in the Smokies. For a backpack, Debby would go from Charlies Bunion to Davenport Gap.

In conclusion,

Debby was recently interviewed by the Mountain Xpress for its Green Scene section [July 29 to August 4]. She is quoted as saying that she “has seen a recent increase in outdoor users. But she notes that trail crowding, especially on weekends, has actually lightened up since the start of Phase 2.”

“We are in a good position,” Debby concludes. “We were able to continue hiking as individuals. Because so many of us know the trails, we could go places without millions of people. We opened up the outdoors. Everybody wants to be outside.”