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128 CHAPTERS MAKE LIBERAL DRINKING CLUB A NATIONAL PHENOMENON
(One pint at a time)

Could political change really be brewing up at the bar on your corner?

“Drinking Liberally” clubs are pouring across the country; creating welcoming social spaces around progressive politics and bringing together activists, newcomers and everyone in between...even Mayoral candidates & members of Congress. One part Moveon.org and one part Tammany, the club brings the energy of online social networks into the face-to-face world of old-style 19th century bar-room politicking.

“What better way to share your ideas than by sharing a pitcher?” asked Justin Krebs, one of the club's founders and directors. “Politics shouldn't be reserved for rooms with fluorescent lighting – we need it in our everyday lives.” Inebriation isn't the end goal; engagement is. Organizers see these gatherings as an easy first step toward greater political involvement as Liberal Drinkers learn from each other, trade talking points and form bonds that become political fuel during election season...and keep the community growing in between campaigns.

Drinking Liberally is building those bonds in many places where liberals really need a drink. “Too many people write off ‘red states,’ but our leaders in small towns, the South and traditionally conservative areas are some of our most active. They have to be,” explains National Organizer Katrina Baker, another of the network's directors. From six chapters in the heart of Texas to a dozen in the perpetual battleground of Pennsylvania, Drinking Liberally has given like-minded, left-leaners a much needed oasis...at the local watering hole, of course.

“Many progressives have found an online community, but they are hungry – or thirsty – for a real community, for face-to-face interaction, local compatriots...and new friends. This gives them a safe step away from their computer,” says David Alpert, the group's webmaster and one of its directors. The internet has facilitated the expansion of Drinking Liberally, which grew from one chapter in May, 2003, to 16, by the election of 2004, to 125 as 2006 began. But the organizers are adamant that the left's strength is in the “offline” community – or the “real-world” as non-websurfers call it.

“Debating is more fun in person. Recruiting volunteers for a campaign is easier in person. Flirting is better in person. This should all be part of our movement, so it's all part of Drinking Liberally,” offers Matthew O'Neill, a director of the group who founded it with Krebs in May, 2003, in a dive bar in Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan. Approaching its third anniversary and the 2006 midterm elections, the club has big plans that include book tours with national bloggers and a push for chapters in all fifty states.

The original chapter continues to meet in the same backyard of the same beer hall, with cheap beer, free hot dogs and lively conversation. Now, the occasional member of Congress stops by as well.

If you'd like more information on Drinking Liberally, visit www.DrinkingLiberally.org, e-mail Justin@drinkingliberally.org or call 732-801-5705. The Original New York City Drinking Liberally meets every Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at Rudy's, 627 9th Avenue, between 44th and 45th Streets.

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