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Falls resident speaks at Democratic National Convention

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by Steve Wiandt

Reporter

Cuyahoga Falls -- One of Barack Obama's "American Voices" came from Cuyahoga Falls.

Monica Early, a Falls resident born and raised here, spoke during the final night of the Democratic National Convention in Denver Aug. 28.

"I can't believe I have this honor," Early told Record Publishing Co. from her cell phone two days before her convention appearance.

Early said she got a phone call from the Obama campaign Aug. 19 inviting her to speak. She said she's been "on cloud nine" ever since. "She was selected by the campaign following her impassioned introduction of Sen. Obama in February [in Akron]," said Keary McCarthy, regional communications director for Ohio for Change, Obama '08.

"She was selected to be a part of the American Voices program, which features everyday Americans who have been powering Barack Obama's campaign for change," McCarthy said. "The speakers selected are from across the nation, but they are all brought together through their personal stories." He said 17 speakers were selected.

Early said she began researching Obama in January. She said she liked his early stance against the war in Iraq. "He had the wisdom to speak out," Early said. "He predicted the mess we're in now."

She said she was impressed by the fact that although Obama could have had any job he wanted after graduating from Harvard, he chose to be a civil rights lawyer in Chicago, earning \$25,000 a year.

"He had the sincere desire to help people help themselves ... That's what he's lived," she said.

Sold on Obama, Early volunteered to work in the Akron campaign office every evening, making phone calls and going door-to-door, prior to the Ohio Primary.

She said she had never been involved in politics before. "I had an attitude of vote and hope for the best -- flip a quarter -- not a sense of empowerment."

Early got to meet Obama in February when she introduced him at a rally at the John S. Knight Center in Akron. She said she was impressed by his sincerity and humility. Early said Obama shook her hand, looked her in the eye and thanked her for helping with his campaign.

Growing up Monica Simmons, Early is a graduate of Cuyahoga Falls High School. She is married to Richard Early and has two grown daughters, a stepson and two granddaughters. She is employed by an insurance agency in North Canton.

Early noted a previous job required her to join Toastmasters, a nonprofit organization that helps people become more confident in front of an audience. She said she attended meetings for two years in the late 1970s, never realizing the skills she learned would be used on such a grand scale.

She said that although the attention on her was "fun" but she wants the attention on Obama.

"I hope to help make an undecided [voter] consider him more seriously," she said. "I hope to make him, Cuyahoga Falls and Ohio proud."

According to the Newsweek Magazine Blog "Stumper" by Andrew Romano, one undecided voter at the convention was moved to support the ticket -- not by all the speeches of big name politicians -- but instead by the brief two-minute perspective offered by Early.

Romano wrote, "[Malissa] Garcia said she was hooked when Monica Early of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio -- one of a series of 'ordinary Americans' who spoke before the senator -- confessed that she too had received a 'scary email,' but had discovered, after checking the facts, that 'Barack Obama is a man of faith, a man of values and a man of action.'"

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