

By GARY LARKIN  
Register Citizen Staff

WINSTED — A Ralph Nader report two years ago and a selectmen's meeting was all Linda Condon needed to get started in citizen activism.

Having stumbled into her role as Winsted's environmental watchdog during the past two years, the 43-year-old Condon is certainly leaving her mark.

"I received the Nader report survey in the mail" in 1989, Condon said. "It asked questions like, 'How would you consider citizen involvement?' I couldn't answer them."

A few weeks after receiving the survey, Condon went to Northwestern Connecticut Community College to hear consumer advocate and Winsted native Ralph Nader release his report on citizen activism. His message sparked her to become involved in local government.

"I went to a town meeting," Condon said. "I was watching the citizens (speak) to the Board of Selectmen. I said, 'I can do that.'"

She decided to attend the next meeting at town hall a week later. To her surprise, it wasn't a meeting of the Board of Selectmen, but of the committee for the disabled. By the time she finally caught up to the selectmen, she had decided she wanted to join the regional landfill board.

She went to a Board of Selectmen's meeting and told her friend who accompanied her of her intentions. "My friend took my hand and put it up. I lobbied to the mayor for the appointment."

The aspiring songwriter and lyricist has taken on many different roles in addition to her duties as secretary in the faculty office of Northwestern Connecticut Community College and as mother of three teenagers.

She is Winsted's recycling coordinator, a board member of the Regional Refuse Disposal District No. 1 landfill in Barkhamsted, chairman of the town's polystyrene task force, a member of the town's Conservation Commission and its subcommittee, the Shade Tree Committee. She is also the town's Earth Day coordinator and vice president of Mad River TV Channel 13, the public access cable television station.

Her husband, Thomas, who is chairman of the town Board of Education, shares her commitment to involvement in town affairs.

"We both go in different directions," Thomas Condon said. "It allows us to be involved in the community. It allows us to keep our children (knowledgeable) about what's going on in the community."

Having been married for 17 years, the Condons have spent a lot of time volunteering in the community.

"I think it's great," Thomas Condon said of his wife's involvement. "She has a lot of energy and expertise. She is self-taught."

Condon has made a name for herself by educating local businesses about Winsted's new polystyrene foam container ban and helping to draw up a resolution to limit what garbage can be placed in the Barkhamsted landfill.

And more recently she is leading a protest against O & G Industries construction company in Torrington, which plans to build a 5,760-acre landfill on tribal lands in South Dakota owned by the Rosebud Sioux. O & G had signed a contract with the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council in November that was highly criticized by some of the Indians there as well as environmentalists throughout the country.

She has convinced members of Earthshare, a Torrington-based environmental group, and a couple of Indians from an anti-landfill group on the Rosebud reservation to attend the protest at O & G's headquarters at 112 Wall St. this weekend.

"They're (O & G) making money in Connecticut," Condon said. "If what they're doing in South Dakota doesn't hold up to public scrutiny, then how can we trust what they're doing here?"