

Community Lawyer, Judge Speak at NCCC's Law Day

By Linda Condon

5/28/92

Women and our legal system was the theme discussed earlier this month at Northwestern Connecticut Community College by Charlene LaVoie, Winsted Community Lawyer, and the Honorable Wendy W. Susco, Judge of the Superior Court of Connecticut. NCCC's Law and Legal Assisting Society (LALAS) sponsored the "Law Day Celebration" as part of the committee's mission to promote interest in the law and legal assisting, and to provide a platform for disseminating information relevant to legal issues.

James R. Amato, NCCC faculty member and moderator of the Law and Legal Assisting Society, created the law group this semester with the help of 35-40 interested students. "Our group is not designed specifically for students in the legal assisting program, though," Mr. Amato said. "Students in all programs and other individuals interested in the law are welcomed."

Mr. Amato described the group as a community resource, not a legal aid society. LALAS' mission is to educate. "Our members do not step over the line; they may not give legal advice," Mr. Amato said.

In the first semester since its inception, the Law and Legal Assisting Society has sponsored internships for students in the Superior Court in Litchfield, the Conn. Legal Service Office (Legal Aid) of Torrington, and the Community Lawyer's Office in Winsted.

Susan Regalye, the student president of LALAS, has recently been assigned to do her internship at the Winsted Community Lawyer's office. "I have just finished an internship in the legislature," Ms. Regalye said. "And I am looking forward to working this summer with the

Community Lawyer." Ms. Regalye believes the LALAS will benefit the community. "Education and discourse between those in charge of the legal system, the lawyers and judges, and those who require its services, the citizens, will benefit the community," Ms. Regalye said.

LALAS' first speaker Friday night was Charlene LaVoie, the Community Lawyer for the Town of Winchester. The Community Lawyer project is unique to Winsted. Sponsored by the Shateck Nader Trust for the Community Interest, the project provides citizens access to the skills of a lawyer at no charge.

"The Community Lawyer Project builds active citizenry," Ms. LaVoie said. "We need a reminder that citizens make up our Democracy; sexual harassment remains a serious problem. In a town where we are taught to be consumers not December poll, the Conn. Women's Employment products, how to make a buck not how to make a difference. We can't throw our hands up in the air and say we can't fight city hall."

Ms. LaVoie said "citizens are taught to accept and not question the political system, and those that do not are often labeled trouble-makers, assaulants, 16 percent sexual coercion and 13 percent in pain in the asses."

Citizens should learn to question, said Ms. LaVoie. "Was the Rule of Law adhered to in the Rodney King trial with the officer's acquittal? Is it adhered to she added. "when hazardous contaminants poison our food, water and air, when all political candidates are only nominated by becoming indebted to special interests, when taxpayer's assets (public land) are given away at \$5.00 an acre to mining companies who in turn keep the money generated from the mining, or when PAC's (Political Action Committees) bid for the best politician money can buy?"

"An informed citizenry is the life-line of representative democracy," Ms. LaVoie said. The Community Lawyer project serves to demystify the process of government in order to increase citizen participation and regain a healthy and strong democracy.

Wendy W. Susco, Judge of the Superior Court of Connecticut, spoke next about sex discrimination in the work place, stressing that the sexual harassment does not involve sex. "On the surface, it may appear that way," Judge Susco said. "However, it is not about sex, it is about power."

Although Connecticut's Fair Employment Practices Act forbids gender discrimination and sexual harassment remains a serious problem. In a December poll, the Conn. Women's Employment products, how to make a buck not how to make a difference. We can't throw our hands up in the air and say we can't fight city hall."

Susco, "Sixty-six percent of the callers reported incidents of harassment involving reported incidents of harassment involving demeaning statements, and the display of offensive photos (pin ups)."

Judge Susco said that the time has come for women to stop being quiet and occasionally raise their voices. "God-damn-it, no we won't take it anymore," Judge Susco said. "Until then all of us must bear the responsibility."