Advocate Aims to Give Citizens a Voice in Government

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uncommon for her to be stopped three or four times by Winsted residents seeking to jawbone about the issues.

"I enjoy talking to citizens and hearing what they have to say. And I tell you, they have a lot to say."

The theory driving the Naders' project is that participatory democracy has devolved into an 'efficiency' model of governing, populated by career politicians and so-called experts versed in the esoteric language of the law.



On a typical day, she will spend the morning and most of the afternoon meeting with clients or doing research in her office, take a break late in the day and spend the evening at a community meeting—or two. LaVoie also teaches a paralegal course at Northwestern Connecticut Community College.

The Nader Trust declines to reveal her compensation; LaVoie will say only that she receives a "public-interest salary."

"The ultimate goal of a community lawyer is to do myself out of a job," she says. "When citizens know the process, when they are not intimidated by it, and are ready to accept responsibilities as citizens, what more could a democracy ask for?

"When the citizens can advocate for themselves," she says, "there will be no need for me."

LaVoie's conviction that residents *are* interested in matters of government is the driving force behind her work. She bristles visibly when citizens are described as "apathetic."

"The sense of self-government is strong in small towns," she says. "There is no doubt in my mind that people were interested in being involved in decisions here."