Environmental issues have done the most to galvanize Winsted residents. Concern over the use of foam packaging by local merchants led residents to approach the community lawyer's office in 1990, and Thomas began working on an ordinance, later completed by LaVoie, prohibiting the use of polystyrene foam and polyvinyl chloride in food containers within the community. Although state law forbade municipalities to bring an outright ban on foam packaging if the user demonstrated a comprehensive effort to recycle the material, LaVoie managed to craft a town recycling ordinance so stringent that businesses had little choice but to give up using foam products. Despite intense lobbying by the plastics industry and officials representing the local McDonald's, the town council passed the ordinance. Two weeks later, McDonald's Corp. announced its decision to phase out its foam packaging.

The victory was a watershed for many fledgling community activists, says Linda Condon, a Winsted resident who supported the ban.

"I could have made a loud noise but I probably wouldn't have known the proper procedure or the proper channels," she says. "With the community lawyer's help, we simplified all this confusing language and brought an ordinance to the town council."

Residents next became concerned over the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's policy requiring states to provide sites for storage and disposal of all radioactive waste generated within their borders by 1996. They also wanted to know more about the NRC's decision to declassify low-level radioactive waste (described as BRC waste, or "below regulatory concern)" and permit its disposal in landfills and the regular waste stream. The community lawyer's office researched the subject, and Winsted passed a community resolution banning the disposal of such waste within its borders. LaVoie and other citizens testified before the state Department of Environmental Protection and the legislature about the issue. In July 1991, the state of Connecticut passed a law prohibiting the declassification of BRC waste in Connecticut, challenging the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's policy.

"I wish every community throughout the U.S. could have access to such a powerful resource," says Condon. With LaVoie's help, the novice activist is now busy working on a new project: a petition drive opposing the town Recreation Department's application to create a soccer field on the site of an old landfill.

Playing Politics?

Initiatives like those have elicited praise from citizens and town government alike; indeed, some local officials would like to see LaVoie's office working only toward such broad-based community goals, and keeping out of what transpires in Town Hall.

That feeling came to a head in late 1991, when the town was torn in a bitter debate over the fate of the town manager, Wayne Dove.

After the Winsted Board of Selectmen voted to fire Dove, vaguely citing concerns over his performance, angry citizens, suspecting the move was based on behind-the-scenes political deals, approached LaVoie. She announced the formation of a citizens' group and began a petition drive, asserting that, under the town charter, residents—not the selectmen—had the final say on whether the manager should be dismissed.

LaVoie won a temporary injunction preventing the selectmen from finalizing Dove's dismissal and filed for a permanent injunction in Litchfield Superior Court. She argued that since the town charter divides the legislative duties between the town meeting and the selectmen, residents have the right to vote on the dismissal of the town man-

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