

Wrentham Citizens Alliance
**“The Key to a Healthy Community is a Concerned, Active
and Informed Citizenry”**

by Leah J. Matuson

Twenty-one years ago a group of concerned Wrentham residents got together to discuss a pressing local environmental issue that could have had a tremendous negative impact on their town. These concerned residents, members of the Wrentham Citizens Alliance, boldly fought against a Planning Board decision that would have allowed an earth removal project on top of Wrentham’s most productive aquifer.

The project promoter was not amused and sued those residents who spoke out against the project. In the end, the court dismissed the suit as groundless, and the project never saw the light of day. You could say the Wrentham Citizens Alliance was off to a rousing start!

And, based on this Wrentham case and others, in 1994 the Massachusetts State Legislature enacted the first anti-SLAPP statute in the Commonwealth to prevent law suits against citizens speaking out on a public issue. (SLAPP stands for strategic litigation against public participation.)

In 1987, the Alliance held its first Candidates Night to acquaint voters with the candidates running in the local town election. This event was so popular that it has been held every year since. The Alliance also hosts public forums on variety of matters such as Public Building Projects, Taxes and Fees, and Capital Debt. In addition, the Alliance awards an annual scholarship to a King Phillip High School Senior for the best essay on a citizenship topic.

Wrentham resident and Wrentham Citizens Alliance President for her third year, Barbara Keane, talks about the Alliance.

“We have a positive focus, to educate the public and bring people together to do good things, helping the town grow in a positive way. We accomplish this through many of the public forums we put on, such as Candidates Night, and through the cable television series we produce.”

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Meet the Candidates

Twenty years and 150 members later, the Wrentham Citizens Alliance is still producing Candidates Night.

“We get the candidates together to talk about the issues, and then make this information available to the townspeople,” remarks Keane. “Whether people attend in person or are watching via cable television, we know this forum has been consistently helpful assisting voters to make their decisions.

“Whenever there’s a hot topic, such as an override for the high school, we say, ‘let’s have a forum.’ We get all sides of the issues, and we have a moderator. People are interested in what’s going on, and it’s a great way to clarify things for the public.”

Keane echoes the sentiment of the Alliance Motto saying that it’s important to have a concerned, active and informed citizenry, and “the Alliance is constantly looking for ways to educate. One way to do this is to have people understand how local government works.”

“We did an FYI show about Wrentham town government,” notes Keane. “In another FYI show, we interviewed the chairpersons of the Wrentham Town Boards. People loved it!”

This winter the Alliance will be producing a cable television series on social and civic organizations in Wrentham like the Lazy Loopers, who fly remote-controlled airplanes, Scout troops, the Holly Club, and the Garden Club as well as many others.

Says Keane, “When people are living beyond their own yards, helping each other to make Wrentham the kind of place they really want to live in -- it promotes a healthy and positive environment.”

About the Alliance

According to their website, the Wrentham Citizens Alliance was created to “promote and protect the best interests of the Wrentham community, to encourage and promote a better-informed community and civic spirit, and to maintain the character and the aesthetic qualities of the Town of Wrentham.”

Want to Know More?

For more information about the Alliance, their history, and their programs check out www.wrenthamcitizens.org. For membership information, call Barry Kassler at (508) 384-7733, or Ravi Nadkarni at (508) 384-7889.

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