

CONA

Citizens Offering New Alternatives
www.conamaine.com

PO Box 649, Newcastle, ME 04553
FALL 2007

CONA PLANNING RETREAT

The CONA Board held its annual planning retreat on August 23. Members brought exciting ideas for possible programming during the year—exploring how to deal with the “enemy,” a September program by a local doctor and nurse who have recently returned from volunteering in rural Pakistan, hosting a forum on the coal gasification plant in Wiscasset, learning about efforts in schools to teach non-violent conflict resolution and seeking ways to involve CONA members in support of those efforts, and programs on hot-button issues in this election year. Hopes were expressed that in addition to monthly programs and movies, we might start one or two study groups to address a topic more thoroughly.

If you are interested in helping us pursue any of these ideas or if you have other ideas you would like CONA to consider, please call Board members Wendy Ross Eichler (549-3869) or Mike Stevens (677-2850).

Mike Stevens

“RETIRING” BOARD MEMBERS

As we begin a new year, the CONA Board is without two people who have been a great help to us for years. We could always count on Jo Clauson and Belva Ann Prycel for intelligent insight, passionate commitment to ways of peace and justice, and a willingness to take on tasks, large and small. We miss them already. But they are not the “retiring” kind of people. We know they are just redirecting their considerable abilities and energies, and that we and this whole community will benefit from their new efforts. Thank you, Jo and Belva Ann, for all you have done for CONA!

We also thank Peter Christine and Carolyn Hardman. They made considerable contributions during the year they served on the Board.

TALK ON HATE VIOLENCE POWERFUL

by Kay Liss

The following article appeared in the *Lincoln County News*, Nov. 1, 2007

Violence is not only physical: it can be contained in words. That was one of the clear messages conveyed in a talk by Stephen Wessler, director of the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence, last week in Damariscotta.

To illustrate this point, he began with a heart-wrenching story about a student somewhere in Maine, who was being accused by schoolmates of being gay. The taunting began with verbal abuse, then escalated to increasing levels of physical abuse, from tripping him in the hallways to jamming his head into a toilet and then terrorizing him by putting a noose around his neck. No one who witnessed and overheard the abuse said anything to stop it. Finally, after three months when one of the abusers threatened to bring a gun in to shoot the victimized boy, someone said something to the administration. The boy was 12 years old.

The point Wessler was making was that most likely if someone had said something to criticize the abuse in the beginning, it never would have escalated to the point it did. The silence of others when witnessing hate, bias and bullying is as much apart of the problem as the original crime.

So that people in the audience could experience the ugliness of the language



go to “Talk on Hate...” on page 2

of prejudice, Wessler passed out cards with examples of verbal abuse written on them and asked individuals to read them out loud. The gamut of bias, particularly of another's race, was represented in all its repulsiveness. He then asked us how these made people feel. Everyone said they felt "sickened," a "wrenching in my gut."

The effects of such hate violence on its victims is devastating, he pointed out, ranging from a loss of attention and attendance in school, to depression and even suicidal behavior. Wessler told another poignant story of such a young victim, who had suffered from being teased about her race to the point she was about to take a bottle of sleeping pills to end her torment when one thoughtful student said to her that day in school, "Have a nice day." Just one comment from one person made all the difference to this person's life.

Wessler conducts workshops in schools throughout Maine, but in other states and other countries as well. The trends he's noticed in the schools in the past six to seven years are an increase in ethnicity, as more and more people from different countries move here, creating an increase in ethnic bias; an increase in anti-Semitism; and more inappropriate "touching" of girls by male students.

"Where do bias, hate and inappropriate behavior come from?" Wessler asked rhetorically. "It comes from our peers, parents, the media and popular culture, and also from our leaders."

In the school workshops, he'll take 40 or so students and go through the dynamics of the language of hate. He shows them that it is often only to get a laugh and approval from their peers that they indulge in this behavior, without ever thinking about the damage they might be doing. When he gets them to talk about bias, he said they usually reflect upon it and stop such behavior.

"When you get one of the leaders, one of the kids that everyone looks up to, to stop, then that has an enormous effect on the whole school," Wessler noted.

Some students from an area high school, who attended with one of their teachers, talked about the bullying in their school. They seemed to think such a workshop would be helpful. And most everyone in the

audience could see, without much of a leap, that many of the problems on a larger scale in the world begin with such early acceptance of bias against others for their race or religion.

Wessler began the Center, located in Portland, in 1999 after serving in the state Office of the Attorney General for nearly 20 years, the last seven as the Director of the Civil Rights Unit. He is author of the book, *The Respectful School: How Educators and Students Can Conquer Hate and Harassment*, copies of which he signed after the talk.

Also after the talk, which was sponsored by CONA, board member Joe Brennan announced a public discussion entitled "The Respectful School" at Damariscotta Youth Promise for November 12. For more information about the results of this meeting, call Joe at 563-2476.

A VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

You may have seen an article last month in the *Lincoln County News* about efforts at the Bristol School to maintain a school environment that is free from bullying and teasing. Since that effort matched a concern raised at the CONA Board Retreat, Mike Stevens went to meet with Principal Bobbi Swiderek to see if there are ways CONA can help. She asked for volunteers to be additional friendly adult presences in the lunchroom and on the playground, 12:30-1:30. Just having an adult nearby, reduces negative behavior, and the children enjoy having additional adults to relate to. There is staff coverage in these areas, but just a couple of volunteers a day would help.

If you can give an hour, one day a week, please call Bristol School Volunteer Coordinator Rosalie Landry at 677-2678. If you occasionally have to miss a week or two, that would not be a problem.

BE SURE TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.CONAMAINE.COM

BETSY SHOLL, MAINE'S POET LAUREATE, READING AT POTLUCK AND POETRY

CONA is honored and excited to have Betsy Sholl as our featured poet at this ever popular gathering, Thursday, December 6, at 6 pm in the Lincoln Academy Dining Hall, Newcastle.

As Maine's third Poet Laureate, Betsy Sholl began her five-year term in 2006. From Portland, Maine, Betsy holds an MFA in poetry writing from Vermont College, an MA in English literature from the University of Rochester, where she was the Woodrow Wilson Fellow, and a BA in English Literature from Bucknell University, magna cum laude. Betsy teaches at Stonecoast Writers



Conference, the Frost Place, Vermont College, and has been visiting poet and poet in residence in numerous institutions. She is the author of eight books of poetry, her latest being *Late Psalm*, published in 2004. Her awards include the Maine Arts Commission Individual Artist Fellowship Award, the 1999 and 2002 Crowley/Weingarten Award for Excellence in Teaching, Vermont College, the 1997 Felix Pollak Prize from the University of Wisconsin, and the 1994 National Endowment for the Arts Artists Fellowship.

Bring a dish and a selection from one of your favorite poets—and that may be you—to share. We encourage you also to bring a few extra copies of the poem you will read for the rest of us to savor again later. Potluck and Poetry will start with supper at 6 pm. (CONA will provide beverages). For more information contact Doris Balant, 563-1216.

Two Poems by Betsy Sholl *Messengers Falling to Our Aid*

Sometimes everything dazzles—broken glass
on the river bank, rain dimpling the sand.
But aren't there days you'd gladly slip like a dime
through the silver slats of the boardwalk
and dissolve in the pastel froth the tide swirls?
That's why, when noonlight suddenly obliterates
the surface of every leaf, we need a voice to linger
in our minds, whispering let go, or go on,
need lip-shaped window smudges where something
invisible has kissed us. Wind turning our clothes
inside out, coffee making a stranger's breath familiar—
clearly, not all messengers pour out vials
of destruction or braid glass chips into a saint's
leather belt. Some must be sent to teeter
on the edge of a smoke-filled room, watching
color spatter as the wheel revolves and light
plucks the fine grooves of a guitar's steel strings.
Were they supposed to tell us something?

It's all mixed up now with the singer's breath
deep in the mike, her lowered head,
hair falling over a half-whispered rasp,
collapse of ice cubes in an untouched glass,
a match scrape's millisecond of nothing,
and then—the blue birth of flame.

~ ~ ~

The Same Elegy Never Completed Each Day It's a Different Death *for my father*

Your life is over before mine begins
like some electrical implantation
that leaves just the idea of you

I used to know the difference
between you and all the dead presidents
you and all the dead miners
who were illiterate and drunk by 6:30
the people who did not die
at their desks well dressed
and in control of things

When the car broke down in a snowstorm
just outside Jim Thorpe Pennsylvania
I wanted to feel at home

Nothing of us may ever reach the stars
but all the flowers in the Trenton graveyard
have had their fill of you

The logo for CONA (Connecticut New England Arts Association) features the word "CONA" in a serif font. The letter "O" is replaced by a stylized graphic of a bird in flight, with its wings spread, set against a circular background.

MIDCOAST GREEN COLLABORATIVE

(In part excerpted from an article by Paul Kando on the organization's website)

The Midcoast Green Collaborative (a project of the Community Building Trust, a local non-profit), was formed by a group of local citizens. We observed that global warming and consequent climate change were becoming recognized around the world as a crisis demanding attention and action. And we observed that a number of nations (alas not the United States government) recognize this growing public awareness and are willing to treat it as a business opportunity, particularly in the area of renewable, alternative energy products and services.

Our intention, therefore, is to put the Damariscotta area on the map as Maine's premier renewable energy center, where businesses offering alternative energy products and services flourish and grow, providing a whole array of well paying jobs to area residents. Furthermore, because renewable energy is usually local in both origin and use, the jobs created will not be easily outsourced to distant lands.

Lately the Collaborative is getting involved with the Maine Energy Education Program, teaching kids how to energy-audit their school (and home). We are also starting an energy audit program for houses in the Damariscotta/Newcastle area, focusing on nonprofit membership organizations. Interested CONA members wishing to have a professional energy audit at a deeply discounted rate should contact Paul Kando at 563-5487 or kando@lincoln.midcoast.com, mentioning that they are CONA members. The audit will be performed by a state-certified residential auditor.

For more information about this local environmental organization go to <http://www.midcoastgreencollaborative.org>

Keep in touch with your Congressional representatives

Sen. Olympia Snowe

3 Canal Plaza, Portland, ME 04101
207-874-0883 • <http://snowe.senate.gov>

Sen. Susan Collins

1 City Center, Suite 100, Portland, ME 04101
207-780-3575 • <http://collins.senate.gov>

U. S. Rep. Tom Allen

234 Oxford St., Portland, ME 04101
207-774-5019 • <http://tomallen.house.gov>

ABOUT OUR EARTH

from Robert Aitken, American Buddhist teacher

You live in your all-inclusive universe as you stand up, sit down, and go to the toilet. There is actually only one dimension—in the whole universe there is no being that is not yourself: the bombers and the hapless peasants they bomb, the lumber executives and the old-growth forests they chop down, your spouse and kids tooling around with you in your SUV, and the innumerable who cannot afford a bicycle. Peasants and redwoods are not "out there".... (We are) living and dying together in a dynamic network of mutual interaction. Bombs destroy the bombers. Chain saws level the mansions. SUVs poison the air and exhaust oil reserves, and those of us still with feet are reduced to walking. You cannot get out of the boundless dimension that you center, the plural of "you" of course, but the one responsible is singular.

CONA PROGRAM SUPPORTED PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE RELIEF

For most of us the terrible October 2005 Pakistan earthquake has slipped out of memory amidst other dramatic events in our world, and the busyness of our own lives, but the people of that region this event still live with its enormous consequences. Recently the CDRS Pakistan Medical Relief organization working on the rehabilitation of the permanent healthcare system in District Muzaffarabad announced the groundbreaking for a new hospital building for Chikar in Kashmir. In September CONA presented a program by Nurse Helen Weld and Dr. Judy Sandick, both associated with Miles Hospital, which brought donations of \$1,738 to CDRS.

Watch for news of this upcoming CONA program

In January CONA will present a program about Seeds for Peace, a non-profit, non-political organization that helps teenagers from regions of conflict learn the skills of making peace. Jonathan Teel, son of Dr. Allan Teel and Carol Teel, who worked two summers as a counselor in the Seeds of Peace International Camp in Maine, will participate and is helping to coordinate the presentation.

CONA BOARD MEMBERS

Leadership Committee

Michael Stevens
mikemary@midcoast.com

Executive Secretary

Millie Baggs
milbags@fidewater.net

Treasurer

Don Means

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Julia Myers

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Gretchen Hull

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Jean Harris
Joan Grant
Kay Liss
Tom Myers

Program Committee

Wendy Ross Eichler

Peaceful Beginnings

Jenny Begin

Hospitality

Caroline Walker

Newsletter

Doris Balant



New and returning CONA board members posing for a recent photo are (front row, left to right) Sharon Crosbie, Kay Liss, (2nd row) Mike Stevens, Joan Grant, (3rd row) Doris Balant, Wendy Ross Eichler, Jean Harris, (back row) Joseph Brennan, Rosie Bensen, Ted Clapp. Photo taken by Mary Stevens, edited by Joseph Brennan.

CONA's mission is to provide opportunities to address the evolving problems of peace and social justice locally and globally. Our programs include education, discussion, political action, and celebration to encourage the community to become active, involved citizens. We work in collaboration with other regional organizations sharing concerns for pressing issues such as poverty, overpopulation, war, and environmental protection.



The CONA newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

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It's renewal time!

CONA 2008 MEMBERSHIP

*** KEEP CONA STRONG.**

Your support will expand our activities.

It's joining time!

I am/we are renewing CONA membership for 2008 I/we would like to join CONA

Suggested contribution: \$15 individual; \$25 family; \$50-\$100 patron; or what you can afford. \$ _____

Your additional contribution to the Julia Myers Speakers Fund allows us to bring important speakers from farther away. \$ _____

Total Contribution \$ _____

Please include your e-mail address: it's the fastest, least costly way we can keep you informed of CONA events and other community activities of interest.

Name _____

e-mail _____ phone _____

Address _____

May we call on you to help with a mailing? YES! to help set up a program? YES!

Please suggest program topics or speakers.

Please mail to CONA, PO Box 649, Newcastle, ME 04553

PEACEFUL BEGINNINGS

January 1, 2008,
Skidompha Library, noon until 3:00 p.m.

Join us to make a peaceful, joyous beginning to the New Year. Everyone, of all ages, is invited to attend CONA's Peaceful Beginnings celebration of community on New Year's Day. The first Peaceful Beginnings was organized during the first Gulf War more than a decade ago as a way to bring people together to reflect, create, foster kindness, get to know our neighbors and focus on the joyful.

Years later, our country is still engaged in aggressive military action around the globe and during Peaceful Beginnings, on this first day of the New Year, we can come together to affirm the peaceful aspects of our society through poetry, music, art, food and conversation.

Everyone is encouraged to bring finger food to share during the informal potluck throughout the afternoon. Check with local newspapers for a complete listing of the events and musicians at the end of December. If you would like to help out in any way, email Caroline

Walker at revcarln@midcoats.com or call Jenny Begin at 563-3781. We hope to see you all on New Year's Day. Invite your friends!



Peaceful Beginnings 2006

The date on your label indicates the calendar year in which you last renewed your membership. Please renew for 2008. Keep CONA strong. Thank you!

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