

Nader calls on Lew-Port audience to take charge of their future

by Terry Duffy

Consumer and environmental advocate Ralph Nader visited the Lewiston-Porter High School auditorium Thursday night and served as the driving force for the hundreds of attending residents concerned about northern Niagara County's environment to take charge of their future.

Nader, who paid a return visit to the Lew-Port campus, served as keynote speaker for the spring environmental conference, "Take Ownership of Your Community -- Know the Toxic Waste in Your Neighborhood," presented by the citizens environmental watchdog group Residents for Responsible Government. He told the crowd, "People need to take care of themselves," as he called for the crowd to take action on the government as well as giant corporations.

"Citizens need to mobilize first, to make sure the forces of government and law and order do their job," said Nader.



Ralph Nader called for closure of CWM at Thursday's Lew-Port session. (Larry Kensinger photo)

63-Year Legacy

Focusing on the 63-year legacy of the once massive Lake Ontario Ordnance Works, which occupied northern Lewiston and Porter, and bringing residents up to speed on the current problems associated with Chemical Waste Management operations, Nader charged, "You're dealing with a silent form of violence. It doesn't come with sirens, it doesn't come with noise," telling attendees these industrial abuses do not seem to abide by law and order.

"You seem to have it the worst," Nader continued, as he told residents that both past governmental LOOW activities and current

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Panel discusses area's environmental plight, urges citizen action

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CWM issues involving unresolved radioactive contamination and ongoing PCB dumping have basically amounted to their using the region as a toxic sewer.

For this, Nader placed blame on both the federal government as well as big business, telling residents they need to call on the government officials to do something about it.

"Corporations have poisoned our land, poisoned our food, for close to two centuries," said Nader.

Calls for CWM Closing

Targeting CWM, he continued, "It's time to shut this dump down," telling residents the concept of "zero pollution emissions is technically feasible ... the problem is corporations won't do it."

Nader charged the community to place further heat on the environmental abuses at CWM, arguing, "CWM's waste dump is not a tourist attraction," as he brought up the toll it has taken on the health of residents as well the quality of life and the economics of the area.

Nader went onto say the US government is wasting hundreds of millions on weapons systems while they turn their back "on toxic terrorism at home" -- a practice he called "institutional insanity."

He wrapped up his nearly 45-minute address with calls for residents to continue to organize, repeat their pressures and keep the heat on both the government and big business to safeguard their

interests. "It's government by and for the people," charged Nader, "Not a government of the Exxons by General Motors for the Chemical Waste Management."

Greater Accountability

Nader closed with calls for greater accountability on big government and corporations. "In this case, justice is health, it's safety, it's recovery of a properly usable environment. It's holding corporations accountable. It's enforcing the law. It's taking care of yourself. It's loving your community."

Nader closed as he challenged residents to take action -- much to resounding cheers and a standing ovation by the audience.

Following Nader, the nearly three-hour Lew-Port forum saw representation by a panel of national as well as local speakers. These included Diane D'Arrigo, director of the Radioactive Waste Project of the Nuclear Information and Resource Service; Paulette Kline, director of the Niagara County Health Department; Rodger Cook of the Western New York Committee on Occupational Health; and RRG representatives, including Vince Agnello, RRG president, and members April Fideli and Tim Henderson. All offered insight as we argued for the community to gain the upper hand in the environmental plight.

Paulette Kline

Kline, who of late has taken the role of watchdog for the area's health and environmental interests, told the residents

of her activities in developing the Community LOOW Project -- a geographic information system database for the purpose of identifying problems on the LOOW site and establishing remediation solutions.

"This is a very worthwhile initiative in this county," said Kline, who told attendees her goal with this effort is to see that the LOOW site and the materials transported there do not continue to contribute to the area's health problems any further.

"We have unexplained illnesses in this area," said Kline, who said her study will focus on multi-agency investigations. "We'll be looking at every study done over the past 40-50 years ... if we find anything, we're prepared to take the necessary steps."

Kline, who estimated the cost of this study to be in the \$200,000 range, said its cost in the end to grow to two to three times that amount. "We're pursuing all available funds," Kline said, as she credited the efforts of the County Legislature, the towns of Lewiston and Porter in assisting her thus far on this effort.

Take Back the Community

The balance of the speakers continued on the theme that

residents need to take control of the environmental abuses situation, both at LOOW as well as at CWM. D'Arrigo focused on how current government legislative actions on deregulating nuclear waste stands to present an even further problem, while Cook told of how its impact on both past and current workers remains a very serious issue. All placed the onus on residents to further address these issues.

"It's time to make the right decisions," said Agnello. "It's time to take back the community."

CWM's Dick Sturges, who said there was representation by CWM in the audience Thursday night, conveyed the company's continuing intentions to work with the community and governmental agencies.

"CWM is committed to providing a safe workplace and to protecting the public's health and the environment by complying with all local, state and federal regulatory requirements," Sturges said in a statement.



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