

The artist and his art

Artist Boguslaw Wroblewski had an opening night reception at the New England Carousel Museum's art gallery on April 4 for his exhibit, 'The Beauty of Litchfield Hills- An Artist's Journey with Nature through Photography.' The exhibit runs thru April 27.



LYNN ALLEN

West End: Study intended to spark discussion

From page 1

As for income, the data shows the average household income in the city was estimated at \$20,000 higher the west end's average household income last year. But, Grossman said the trends show that the west end is keeping pace and rising about the same level of the city's household average income.

Homeownership is on the rise, estimated at 32.6 percent last year. But, the majority of homes in the neighborhood are rental apartments. Rental units were estimated to make up 54.6 percent of the homes last year; that percentage has been decreasing since 1990.

As homeownership and rental units go in opposite directions, the percentage of vacant homes has nearly doubled since 1990 to an estimated 12.8 percent last year.

Weiner said the vacancy rate is telling of the age of the housing stock in the neighborhood, along with the state of the economy.

Grossman added that

in conversations with landlords from the neighborhood she's been told that it was difficult to rent homes because of the uncertainty surrounding a possible new K-8 school in the west end.

Crime trends in the neighborhood were looked at over the past five years. The trends spotted were attributed to an increase in police activity. Since 2003, proactive community policing activities, which include directed and special patrols, in the west end have increased from none to over 800. The higher police presence has led to a five year increase of 247 arrests, with 241 of them being motor vehicle arrests. But, the number of quality of life and youth related incidents have decreased over the same period.

"What we would expect to go up went up. What we would expect to go down went down," said Police Chief John DiVenere.

Grossman said the education level of people in the neighborhood was looked at the see if any red flags stood out. Nothing was out of the ordinary, she said.

The percentages of people with a high school and a college education have increased following trends across the state and nation.

Grossman said the trends show a fairly stable neighborhood. "It's not a neighborhood that's failing," she said. "It's a neighborhood that's holding its own but needs some help."

The statistical trends aren't meant to be the end all of the study Grossman said. She said they are meant to help distinguish between perception and reality, and to be used as the backdrop to the conversation on how to improve the neighborhood.

"This is an educational process and (the trends) aren't meant to be conclusions," Grossman said. "It's meant to be a start to the conversation."

Grossman said the next step in the study will be to take a more specific approach, including discussing specifically the areas in the neighborhood that people like, don't like, where they feel safe and unsafe.

Weiner said it's the peo-

ple invested in the neighborhood that will be the key to the study's success, not just statistical information. He said part of the study itself is intended to empower the people within the west end, who will ultimately play the largest role in any change within the neighborhood.

"The study is about people. ... The data helps you identify people and what they're about. But, (the study's) about more than numbers," Weiner said.

The west end neighborhood advisory committee will be holding its next public meeting, Saturday, May 3 to move forward with the study. Any and all interested individuals are invited to attend. The meeting will be held from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., but as of press time the location of the meeting was yet to be determined.

For more information about the west end study visit The Casptan Group's website at www.cpstn.com and click on the west end study link.

Comments? Email egugliotti@BristolObserver.com.

Housing rent hikes halted

Tenants who live in state public housing projects administered by the Bristol Housing Authority could get a reprieve from steep pending rent increases under a bill approved unanimously Thursday by the state House of Representatives and the state Senate, state representatives Ron Burns and William A. Hamzy said last week.

Many tenants who were facing sharp rent increases because of cuts in a program that helps fund state housing projects administered by

the authority were concerned that they would not be able to afford the higher rents, said representatives Burns and Hamzy, who voted for the measure.

The bill passed the House on a vote of 146-0 and was immediately transmitted to the state Senate, where it also passed unanimously. The measure now goes to Governor Rell to be signed into law.

"(This) is good news for Dutton Heights, Mountain Laurel Manor and Zbikowski Park tenants," said Burns.

Challenge: BEHS program

From page 1

April 28, 29, and 30.

Wininger said Principal Dr. V. Everett Lyons offered his support for the effort when he watched the "Oprah" tape. And he offered some school funds to make it happen.

Additional funds were provided by the Bristol Business Education and the Main Street Foundaton, said Wininger. Both organizations also felt Challenge Day was a good day.

Most of the effort on organizing the event has been generated by students, said Hochman. But volunteers from the community at large are needed as well.

"As a parent, I like the idea of community involvement and (members of

community) knowing what kids are going through," said Hochman.

At the end of the three days, Wininger said she hopes participants will think twice about their actions and realize the impact of their actions. From there, Wininger hopes there will be a 'ripple effect' from the lessons of Challenge Day that will spread throughout the community.

"My goal is, I have a picture of a kid... who has felt a sense of isolation walking into the building... (and) by the end (of Challenge Day) they will feel 'I belong here,'" said Hochman.

Members of the community who want to participate or help out, can email Wininger at ErinWininger@ci.ct.bristol.us

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