

# Citizen Action news

A quarterly publication of WV-Citizen Action Group

## WV-CAG Moves to Dixie Street

Our new place is at the corner of Ruffner and Dixie and is a pretty, peaceful location. (Of course once the neighbors figure out who we are that could change).

1500 Dixie Street is a large old two-story house that is, well, friendly. Our front room has become a comfortable welcome area that is already full of information about CAG and other organizations.

This "new" house provides each member of the staff with his/her private working area, a kitchen for working lunches, a bathroom on each level and, the room we're most proud of, a large, knotty-pine walled conference room.

August was dedicated primarily to making the new place ours. We painted, pulled up carpet, patched ceilings and walls, laid ceramic tile and moved 27 years of stuff from Virginia to Dixie Street.

In October the time was right and the place was ready for us to celebrate. We had an Open House on a beautiful fall evening, showed off our new place and dedicated our big Sycamore tree to Stan Wright. The following is an excerpt from a flyer we had at the Open House:

***The first question any reasonable person would ask is, "How can a group that is always asking for money afford such a nice, new home?"***

The answer is through a combination of some generous personal donations from our Board of Directors (financial and elbow grease), a cagey Realtor (Hal Weber), and a creative and progressive foundation (the Dunn Foundation). We've moved on up!

For an additional \$200 a month or so, WV-CAG has quadrupled its office space, reduced our utility bills and, perhaps most importantly, moved out of the dank, dark basement.

It's fitting that our new home has one of the largest trees on the East End. It's a special tree and we've named it after a special friend and super volunteer, Stan Wright. Stan, a handyman's handyman, sculptor and artist, donated countless hours to renovating and improving our Dixie Street office.

We're about 90% finished. The upstairs bathroom is yet to be completed and curtains and wall hangings yet to be decided upon. The house has a

large meeting room we've named it the Dunn Pine Room as an expression of deep gratitude to Dr. Wayne and Kay Dunn of Parkersburg. It was the Dunn Foundation that provided the financing to purchase this building and arrange a lease purchase agreement with WV-CAG.

Please come visit. Check out "Igor's Workshop" in the basement where staffer Gary Z. breathes life into all things broken. Take a load off and sit on our new couch and loveseat donated by Winkie and Sam Kusic of Wheeling. Check out the Mark Blumenstein sculpture, "Sunrise Broaching", on our mantel.

We love our new home and promise to be more efficient and effective because of the increased morale windows bring. Over the next six months, WV-CAG will be representing the consumer perspective on such issues as overweight coal trucks, medical malpractice, campaign finance reform, a West Virginia container law and key environmental issues that will undoubtedly arise.

We've always been proud of our program work. Now, for the first time, we have a work place that complements and enhance our work.

## Putting Your Money Where Your Heart Is

Dr. Wayne Dunn and wife Kay have been consistent supporters of WV-CAG for over a decade. Wayne's successful Parkersburg dental practice enabled the couple to establish the Dunn Foundation dedicated to assisting environmental and social justice groups. Wayne and Kay have said that because of a growing practice and three active teenagers they couldn't devote as much time as they wanted to working for social justice and a cleaner West Virginia environment.

It was the Dunn Foundation that enabled WV-CAG to buy the Dixie Street property this summer. Wayne and Kay have demonstrated creative ways to assist groups like WV-CAG. On behalf of the staff and board of directors, please accept our profound gratitude. Your generosity is an inspiration to all of us that have a vision for a better West Virginia.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Norm Steenstra

It's a gorgeous October afternoon and I'm sitting on the porch of our new Dixie Street office. Although you're probably sick by now of hearing about Dixie Street, I can't overstate the positive effect the new place has had on the staff, the board and our volunteers. Hey, working out of an almost windowless damp basement all these years was a lot of fun but we all have to move on.

October is a key month for us. The governor has called a special legislative session on the medical malpractice crisis. The WV-CAG position is one of some real sympathy for the state doctors and hospitals but absolutely no sympathy for the insurance lobby. It's a clear-cut case of large insurance companies holding state doctors hostage. Under no circumstances can we let the insurance industry use this crisis as an excuse to limit the rights of victims. The larger issue of so-called "tort reform" is protecting the historic trust our judicial system places in a jury of peers. Are there some "greedy" lawyers that push the envelope of justice with big awards? Sure! Are there frivolous defenses by insurance companies that pull out all the stops to deny their clients obvious wrong doings? Yes, of course.

The defeat of any additional "tort reform" in West Virginia is a historic WV-CAG position. Our judicial system is far from perfect but it provides a decent balance between the rights of the plaintiff and the defendant. Any tipping of the scales of justice toward the insurance industry adversely affects that balance.

Another thing about October is that it's the time when we begin to gear up for the January legislative session. For the past 12 years, WV-CAG has coordinated (and largely staffed) the lobby effort of the West Virginia Environmental Council (WVEC). Although we will still work closely with the WVEC and support its agenda, we will not be performing that service to the WVEC this year. It's time for our offspring to move out on its own and WV-CAG to enjoy the empty nest.

We're still formulating our legislative agenda and encourage you to give us your thoughts. Certainly, campaign finance reform, overweight coal trucks, "tort reform", water quality and an eventual WV Container Law will be some of our major issues. Connecting the dots is what WV-CAG does. Can you imagine how happy coal and insurance companies would be if the Legislature passed "tort reform" and placed caps on how much a person injured or killed by an illegal coal trucks could receive? Campaign finance reform connects all the dots. Special interest influence at the Legislature continues to erode the voice of citizens who cannot afford lobbyists. Campaign finance reform is the reform from which all other reforms are possible.

Some issues are obvious for us. Others slip through the cracks. Please take a moment via e-mail ([nsteenstra@wvwise.org](mailto:nsteenstra@wvwise.org)) or phone (304-346-5891) to give me your thoughts on other issues or directions that WV-CAG should be focussing on in the coming year.

## Citizen Action news

**Citizen Action News** is the newsletter of the West Virginia-Citizen Action Group (WV-CAG), a statewide, nonprofit organization representing more than 20,000 households from all regions of the Mountain State.

WV-CAG, organized in 1974, is dedicated to increasing citizen participation in economic and political decision-making. By educating people about key public interest issues and involving them in the decisions that affect their lives, WV-CAG works for progressive changes in federal, state and local policies -- ranging from environmental protection and consumer rights to good government and health care reform.

**Citizen Action News** welcomes letters, articles and photographs from readers. We reserve the right to edit or reject submissions. Reproduction in whole or part is permitted with proper credit.

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***Having trouble calling us? Verizon has our number listed incorrectly in the most recent phone book. 346-5892 (the wrong number) is actually a fax number somewhere! Ignore the phone book and call us at 346-5891.***

## A Bottle Bill For West Virginia

by Linda Mallet, [linda@wvcag.org](mailto:linda@wvcag.org)

WV-CAG is dedicated to the eventual passage of a WV container law. Given the less than spectacular results of recycling programs in our state, a WV bottle bill would drastically reduce litter on our highways, decrease waste entering our landfills, and perhaps most importantly, significantly reduce energy consumption.

Waste makes no sense on a planet that is already seriously overpopulated. Wasting energy and natural resources for the mere convenience of a throwaway society is just plain wrong.

### Why Have a Bottle Bill?

Ø Net gains in employment have been documented in nearly every state that has adopted a bottle bill.

Ø Bottle bills are popular with the public. Ten states that have container laws and, once a bottle bill has become state law, it has never been repealed.

Ø Bottle bills require consumers and producers of single-use containers (primarily soft drink and beer) to take care of the waste created by their products. The deposit shifts costs of recycling and clean up from local governments and taxpayers to beverage producers and consumers.

Ø Beer and soda containers are recycled in bottle bill states at rates of **85% and higher as opposed to a national rate of only 38%**.

Ø In 1998 the U.S. used 101 billion aluminum cans and recycled just **56 billion**. Three out of four beer or soft drink containers are aluminum cans. The energy saved from one aluminum can will operate a TV for three hours.

Ø Following passage of container laws, sales for products requiring a deposit increased at or above the national average in most of the states with deposit laws.

Ø Deposit laws and curbside recycling programs work effectively together. On average, 48% of the population in the forty non-bottle bill states is served by curbside recycling, while 64% of the population in the ten bottle bill states is served by curbside recycling. To maximize solid waste reduction, states and communities should have both a curbside recycling program and deposit system in place.

Ø A container law takes revenue away from curbside programs but reduces its costs through avoided collection and disposal costs. Additionally,

curbside programs are operated and funded by local governments. Monies for these programs is never guaranteed. With a bottle bill, the costs are borne by consumers and producers.

### The Road Ahead

Ø Strong lobby efforts and an organized grassroots educational effort is needed to bring the bottle bill to West Virginia. Campaign contributions and public relations campaigns have kept bottle bills from getting anywhere in many state legislatures.

Ø The beverage industry spent over \$14 million in campaign contributions aimed at defeating the National Bottle Bill between 1989 and 1994. Members of an U.S. Senate Committee who voted against the National Bottle Bill in 1992 received an average of 75 times more anti-bottle bill PAC money than those who voted in favor of the bill.

Ø You can help!! Passing a WV bottle bill is going to be a long legislative road. We need your help to get petitions signed, call legislators and educate the public. Call us at 346-5891 to get involved or visit [www.wvcag.org](http://www.wvcag.org)!

## May I Introduce Myself?

My name is Jill Oxley; I am a student at West Virginia State College pursuing a degree in Communications with an emphasis on Public Relations. My goal is to work with an environmental or animal rights nonprofit organization.

Several years ago I received an invitation by phone to join CAG in a protest of the "Dirty Secrets" bill. I went, I saw, I agreed with CAG's point of view. I vowed that when the time came for me to do my internship I would come to CAG. Finally, the time has come and here I am!

During my internship, I will be helping Linda Mallet educate the valley on the dioxin contamination in the Kanawha River, work with the staff on fundraising, contribute to the newsletter, be a part of updating the CAG website weekly, and grant writing.

I want to say "Thank you," to the staff of CAG for allowing me this opportunity and for their patience in teaching me.

I look forward to meeting you all, I hope to be a part of CAG long after my internship is over.

## Campaign Finance Reform Latest

by Julie Archer, [julie@wvcag.org](mailto:julie@wvcag.org)

The West Virginia People's Election Reform Coalition (PERC), a joint project of WV-CAG, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition and Common Cause, is scheduled to release its 2000 election report in early November. Highlights include an in-depth analysis of the 2000 governor's race and a thorough look at special interest contributions to legislative leadership. The report will also document who gave and received the most campaign cash, and who got the most votes for their money. Unlike PERC's previous reports, the 2000 report will not include a summary page on each legislator. However, if you want to know how your delegate(s) or senator fared this past election, PERC has the data, so call the CAG office to get the low-down.

The 2000 Election Cycle Report will be followed in mid-November by the release of a special report comparing the last three election cycles. PERC has been keeping tabs on campaign contributions since the 1996 election and for the first time will be able to look for trends in political spending by special interests over an extended period. In the meantime follow the news for a special report on gambling interests to be released in October.

PERC and CAG have co-sponsored, with the Alliance for Democracy ([www.afd-online.org](http://www.afd-online.org)), publication of Randy Kehler's book, *Political Bribery in the U.S.A: How Corporations and the Wealthy Buy Power and What We Can Do to Stop Them*. The 45 page book includes a brief history and case studies followed by a section on what we can do stop political bribery and advance democracy, with emphasis on ending privately financed campaigns and going to a system of public financing. A voluntary full-public financing option is already available to candidates in the states of Maine and Arizona. The West Virginia Clean Elections Act would put a similar system in place and provide public financing to candidates who are willing to reject private funding. Call or stop by CAG to get your free copy of the book and find out what you can do to move democracy forward.

## What Goes Around Comes Around

At the WV-CAG Open House earlier this month, we were pleasantly surprised (shocked) by WV-CAG founder and former executive director David Grubb's presentation of a check in the amount of \$15,000. The Grubb Law Group represented plaintiffs in the class action suit *Riffle v. White Chrysler Dodge and Bank One*. The suit alleged that the defendants defrauded more than 100 West Virginia consumers in an illegal auto financing scam.

Grubb requested that part of the \$1.1 million settlement be given "Cy Pres" (as near as possible) to a nonprofit group that represented the beneficial intent of the lawsuit. The court approved the request and in so doing resulted in the largest gift WV-CAG has ever received. The award will be used for general support for WV-CAG's continual efforts to represent West Virginians in a variety of consumer issues. The next WV-CAG board meeting will be held at Hilton Head (just kidding)!

## CHIPing Away at Universal Health Care

by Gary Zuckett, Garyz@wvcag.org

West Virginia's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) has become much healthier during the first year of the new Wise administration. Since last year at this time the number of children of working families covered by this joint state/federal program has doubled to over 21,000. This increase was due to a number of factors:

\*A 33% increase in the income guidelines passed by the legislature in 2000. Families can now earn up to 200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) and qualify for CHIP (see [www.wvchip.org](http://www.wvchip.org));

\*An excellent CHIP director and staff with an aggressive and higher profile outreach effort capped by the saturation airing of a TV spot of Kathy Mattea, West Virginia's home-grown country music star, urging parents to sign up their kids;

\*A governor willing to literally walk the streets of small towns across the state with groups of volunteers distributing CHIP info, putting the program on the front page of local newspapers; and last but not most importantly;

\*A coordinated grassroots outreach campaign by the WV Healthy Kids Coalition which, through mostly private funding from local and national foundations, has been working since CHIP's beginning to sign up families in every part of the state.

All this is good news for WV children, but it's just the beginning. We must keep pushing for expansion of CHIP and other health insurance programs until all WV citizens are covered with some type of coverage.

Our nation remains the only developed democracy on the planet that neglects to provide some sort of universal health coverage for its citizen's. This

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### Join! Update Your Membership! Support Our Program Work!

_____ \$15	Student/Senior Membership	_____ \$25	Individual Membership
_____ \$50	Family Membership	_____ \$100	Sustaining Membership
_____	Other		

**Save a stamp!! Update your membership or make a donation on-line at [www.wvcag.org](http://www.wvcag.org).**

Add me to the WV-CAG listserv so I can get issue updates. My e-mail address is \_\_\_\_\_.

Please make your check payable to WV-CAG and mail to 1500 Dixie St., Charleston, WV 25311. Donations to WV-CAG are **not** tax deductible. Please make any address changes to label on reverse side. Thanks!!

situation is now being addressed through HCR 99, a resolution in the US House of Representatives "Directing Congress to enact legislation by Oct. 2004 that provides access to comprehensive health care for all Americans." See [www.uhcan.org](http://www.uhcan.org) (Universal Health Care Action Network)

Contact your representatives in Congress and ask them to support and sign on to HCR 99. It's past time we caught up with the rest of the world...

## Shelter In Place

by Crystal Good, WV State College Student

*Montessouri, Ntozake a PhD  
ain't gonna save yor life  
it's the chemical valley girl  
it's got us all crazy*

*coal miner's daughter is now chemical plant stepkid*

*crabs in a barrel  
don't you try and get out  
stand up and shout*

*nothin that is but overtime  
overtime can't be late*

*lookin to our roots that tangle and twist us here  
cravin' the family bed known it's time to grow up  
and face the face of a three-eyed carp*

*stabilities leaving town  
crossing the atlantic myth on a global-barge  
that's the way dupont du*

*giving only a generation or two  
tuition to spend on tennis shoes and hotel rooms  
and videotapes of Silkwood  
oh sister, sister  
no doulas's ever gonna take the pain of*

*SHELTER IN PLACE*

## The Last Word on Electric Deregulation

*“Nation’s Recent Experience with Electricity Restructuring Reveals Its Near Fatal Flaws”* is the title of an Aug 30, 2001 release by the Consumer Federation of America, a respected no-nonsense policy organization. See it at [www.consumerfed.org/backpage/electricity.html](http://www.consumerfed.org/backpage/electricity.html).

This report is a no-holds-barred condemnation of Deregulation that totally supports WV-CAG's steadfast position against WV's Dereg Plan. As you may be aware WV-CAG was the lone voice at the very end opposing the Public Service Commission's "consensus" plan after all other opponents had been "neutralized" with a piece of the pie.

We will continue to oppose Electric Dereg for the very good reasons outlined in the above report. We also urge the Wise Administration to take heed of the Federation's recommendations: **“Any state that has not restructured should not. States that can slow down or stop should do so.”**

### Construction Finished!

WV-CAG's webpage is ready for you! Visit [www.wvcag.org](http://www.wvcag.org) and you can make donations and be updated weekly on our issues.

We have on-going issues, one or more that affects you and now it is so simple to stay abreast of what's happening. We invite you to visit our website today, and you can even leave us a message!

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