

commUNITY in Washington, PA

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Background

CommUNITY in WashPA is a forum for the greater Washington Community. It's roots are with a group of concerned citizens and civic leaders who gathered to organize the first March Against Violence in the fall of 2012. This group continues to plan events in order to promote a more peaceful and unified Washington.

Monthly meetings are typically held on the first Tuesday of each month at 9 am in the Student Gov't Chambers on W&J's Campus, and are open to anyone.

Regular contributors to the group include representatives from: W&J, the DA's Office for Crime Victims, Domestic Violence Services of SWPA, SPHS, STTARRS program, Washington Drug & Alcohol Commission, Highland Ridge CDC, Washington Church Ministerium, Northwood Realty, West End Neighborhood Watch, and the Mayor and Chief of Police of the City of Washington and the Superintendent of Washington Schools.

Mission Statement

A Better Washington TOGETHER

Vision Statement

Washington community members, organizations and governemnt working together to reduce violence by fostering a safe and healthy environment.

Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan and a Pocket Park for Downtown Washington

In January 2012 the City of Washington and the Borough of East Washington, along with W&J College and other important local institutions, introduced the final version of the Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan (an electronic version can be found on the City of Washington website: <http://www.washingtonpa.us/multi-municipal-comprehensive-plan/>). The Comprehensive Plan was several years in the making and relied upon input from a variety of citizens, businesses, and community stakeholders from the Greater Washington area. The goal of the plan was to consider the existing strengths of Washington, to identify areas for concern and improvement, and to create a vision for the future of Washington. The final plan highlighted six main areas of focus: land use, housing, economy, transportation, community amenities, and historic preservation. Within each of these categories the plan identifies specific recommendations, identifies the institution responsible for implementation and possible partners, and lays out a timeframe based on perceived priority (high is 1-3 years, medium is 4-7 years, and low is 8-10 years).

As a direct result of the Comprehensive Plan two cooperative commissions have been created and consist of members from both municipalities and representatives from community stakeholder organizations. The Washington-East Washington Joint Zoning Commission has worked toward standardizing the zoning regulations in the City of Washington and the Borough of East Washington. The goal of the commission is to streamline the zoning review and approval process so that potential developers will have a clearer understanding of what types of activity can take place within the City and Borough. The Washington-East Washington Joint Planning Commission has worked toward implementing recommendations identified in the plan and collecting information and progress updates on projects that are already underway.

The first major project discussed by the Washington-East Washington Joint Planning Commission was a proposed pocket park to be located in an unused parking lot on East Wheeling Street, between Main Street and College Street. Over the summer the City of Washington, along with Wash Arts, received a \$175,000 grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation to promote public art that has allowed the park plans to continue with the initial work expected to be complete by this coming summer. As part of the initiative, students from Southwest Training Services and Western Area Career and Technology Center will use old street signs from the City of Washington to create a sculpture for the park. This will represent an important addition of green space and seating in the downtown area of Washington and will also serve to improve the connection to the W&J College campus, both recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan. As this beneficial project moves forward all involved hope that this can provide momentum for continued improvements to Washington and surrounding neighborhoods.

Written by: Dr. Robert Dunn, Professor at Washington & Jefferson



The Magellan Project provides funding for W&J students to pursue independent summer research projects or internships that extend liberal arts learning outside the curriculum. These opportunities are open to freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. In addition, students can complete more than one Magellan during their time at W&J. These projects usually range from 3-12 weeks in length and can be domestic or international. They are meant to be truly independent learning and personal growth experiences.

The Magellan Project is an individual-, corporate-, and foundation-funded initiative. Since the program's inception in 2008, Magellan has awarded: \$550,000+ in scholarships, 250+ unique student projects, 40+ country destinations, and 60+ internship awards. Past projects include: studying Holocaust sites in Europe, marketing perfumes in Switzerland, neuroscience research intern at the University of Pittsburgh, healthcare systems in South Africa, and a comparative study of ecotheology in Southeast Asia.

“The Magellan program is unique to W&J. It encapsulates the spirit we’re trying to promote here,” said W&J President Haring-Smith, “and that is the spirit of transforming lives.” In order to apply for a Magellan Project students must complete a series of essays to be reviewed by the Magellan Committee in February. Once those projects have been approved, W&J provides the funding to make them happen.

The required essays include a project description explaining the where, what, how, and why of the project the student is proposing to undertake; a personal statement describing the project connection to the student's life experiences, goals, aspirations, and commitments which include their work at W&J; and lastly a detailed budget for requested Magellan funding to complete the proposed project which includes transportation, lodging, food, research costs, legal documents, medical expenses, travel insurance, and a personal contribution. Even though a Magellan Project is the student's creation from beginning to end, W&J provides a core set of project advisors who help direct students through the application process in order to “write their own story”. Or, as Professor of Economics and Magellan Advisor for Sophomores Tiffani Gottschall put it, “Find out more about the dream that you have. We’re here to support that.”

This year, Magellan hit a new record (256 applications) for intended Magellans to be developed before the February application deadline.

“I find that I am even more curious and driven than I thought I would be after my Magellan. I still believe I am the same person, but somehow wiser from my experiences... More than anything, I feel powerful, blessed, and grateful to have become a part of this incredible program here at Washington & Jefferson College.” ~ Cat Beau-doin’15, 2013 Magellan Scholar: Contemporary Art in Berlin and Prague

For a complete list of current and past Magellan Scholars and projects please visit the Magellan site: <http://www.washjeff.edu/the-magellan-project>

For questions or more information about the Magellan Project please contact Tyler Tenney’14, Coordinator of Co-curricular Innovation and Magellan Project Coordinator at Washington & Jefferson College: ttenney@washjeff.edu or 724-503-1001x6865

-Tyler Tenney, Coordinator of Co-Curricular Innovation at Washington & Jefferson

Speak Out Against Sexual Violence

***This originally was published in LNP on Sunday, November 23, 2014

As allegations against Bill Cosby resurface and new alleged victims come forward, it is important to remember why victims of sexual assault, especially when victimized by celebrities, wait to report, if they choose to report at all. Sexual assault can cause intense feelings of humiliation. Denial, shame and self-doubt are all typical psychological byproducts of being abused by someone you trusted.

Victims often struggle with fears that other people will judge, blame and disbelieve them, and fear how gossip about what has been done to them can further inflict feelings of isolation, shame and humiliation. When the perpetrator is part of the victim's social circle, or someone of upstanding reputation such as a celebrity, they also fear having others side with the abuser.

Those fears can keep victims silent for years after the assault or assaults occurred, particularly if the first person they tell reacts as they had feared. The women who have said that Bill Cosby raped them have said they harbored these fears for years.

Victims sometimes need decades to even admit to themselves that what happened to them was abuse, let alone to muster the courage to file a report about what is perhaps the most traumatic physical and psychological betrayal that one can experience.

Humiliation, shame and fear equal silence. When victims break that silence, they know they'll face a new set of challenges, but it's never too late to speak out.

When victims break their silence, there is help available at rape crisis centers including counseling, support groups and assistance in navigating legal, medical and other systems.

Power, wealth and influence don't make a person more likely to commit sexual assault, but they do make it harder for victims to come forward.

People often attribute tremendous character and credibility to celebrities, whether or not they deserve it. Last month, a man who police believe to be Stephen Collins — who played the father and pastor on "7th Heaven" — confessed on tape to sexually abusing children.

Many were shocked that such a beloved character could commit such an atrocity. But people who commit sex offenses often appear to be nice, responsible, upstanding, loving and law-abiding members of the community. Labels such as "monster," "predator" or "animal" distract us from the fact that these people often use labels such as "teacher," "pastor" or "friend."

Because Cosby is a beloved comedian, a well-known educator and a wealthy man who has not been charged with any crime, many people will dismiss the numerous reports of rape that have emerged and believe him without reservation.

Whatever happens with Cosby, there is hope — hope for a future free from sexual violence. Hope that people who see or know of abusive behaviors will step in to protect potential victims instead of the perpetrators. Hope for survivors to heal from the abuse inflicted upon them and that together we can change the culture we live in, which readily excuses reports of sexual abuse by those with power, wealth and celebrity status.

There is healing for survivors of abuse, and breaking the silence is the first step. The SPHS CARE Center STTARS Program located in Washington and Greene Counties can help. For more information, please call 724-229-5007 or 724-627-6108.

--Kristen Houser is the vice president of public relations for the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape.

Stop Victimization: A Message from the District Attorney's Office



The District Attorney's Office of Victim Services has received funding from the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators (NAVAA) through a grant from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), within the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, to promote community awareness of crime victims' rights and services during 2015 National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

The week of April 19 – 25, 2015, is National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). This annual observance, seeks to increase general public awareness of, and knowledge about the wide range of rights and services available to people who have been victimized by crime. The theme for 2015 National Crime Victims' Rights Week is "Engaging Communities. Empowering Victims."

The District Attorney's Office of Victim Services was one of the 90 projects recommended by the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators and selected for funding by OVC for 2015 from the 194 applications that were submitted nationwide.

According to OVC Director Joyce Frost, "This year's National Crime Victims' Rights Week theme reminds us of the importance to create a victim response system that is open and accessible to all survivors and victims of crime." "It is very important that we build partnerships throughout our communities to better address all victims' needs by believing them and offering support and resources regardless of where they disclose their victimization. Everybody plays a role," Frost said.

According to Betsy Dane, Administrator for Office of Victim Services, the Community Awareness Project that will be sponsored in the City of Washington is intended to connect with the community by holding a series of events in carefully chosen neighborhoods throughout the city. Several small events will provide information about services and answer specific questions. A larger community-wide event will be held where victims will share with the community their stories about the impact of crime, what was helpful, and how our communities can support all victims of crime. The events are scheduled for the week of April 19-25, 2015.

-Betsy Dane, Administrator
District Attorney's Office of Victim Services

The following is a compilation of essays written by students from the Washington School District that were invited to speak at the 2014 March for Peace. It seems that our youth might know a thing or two about what Washington needs to do to unify the community:

DEVLIN FORD:

How does a better Washington community look like, sound like, feel like?

It'll look safer, clean and decorated because of the neighbor litter patrol and a neighborhood watch.

It sounds peaceful and quiet. No gunshots or wailing sirens.

People use their manners.

It feels lighter and safer because there is less pollution.

I would make a neighborhood watch. Have more parades. Start a weekly clean up schedule. Have weekly meetings in the town hall to discuss plans.

Everybody must be tired of violence. It can kill you. But now we fight back using neighborhood watch, neighborhood litter patrol, parades and community gardens. These make a nicer Washington Community!

TANELL PARKS:

Washington would sound better if there was no gang violence in our town. Washington would also sound better if there was more encouragement and nice compliments.

Washington would feel better if everyone greets one another every morning. When you see your neighbor and when you go to school you can say 'hi' to your teachers. Washington would also feel better if we used better manners like saying 'Hi, how are you?'

ALLENA BRUCE:

People think Washington is such a bad place. They never look at the positive side of things. We have positive things to do in Washington. We have things like churches, marches for peace, and other positive things. These are positive things I feel we could do to make Washington a better place.

NAVEHA GRAYSON:

I WANT TO MAKE WASHINGTON A BETTER PLACE.

STOP THE VIOLENCE.

TALK TO PEOPLE

NO SMOKING.

BE SAFE.

BE NICE TO EACH OTHER.

BE SAFE.

LISTEN TO YOUR TEACHERS.

BE KIND.

Dylan Blussick eloquently sums up what is possible for Washington with just a little help from its members:

Doing even the littlest of things in your city can make a difference.

We can change this city because when Washington comes together we can do a lot and change a lot. If we do all of these things, together we can make a difference.