



# Rockland County Legislator Harriet Cornell

District —New City, Nyack, Upper Nyack, Central Nyack and West Nyack

Winter 2011

## Message From Chairwoman Cornell

On January 4, I took the oath of office as Chair of the Rockland County Legislature for a seventh consecutive term. My son, Keith, performed the swearing in ceremony.

In my address to the Legislature that followed, I spoke of many challenges that face Rockland's elected officials this year, but I also said every challenge is an opportunity.

One large opportunity before us is redistricting based on the new census. This is critical to ensure

that every district is close to equal in population in accordance with the "one person, one vote" ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court. With the 2000 census, there were two years before the next legislative election to draw plans. This time, census figures are certified in March with an election in November, requiring petitions to be circulated in June. I would like to hold public meetings in all Rockland towns to hear what redistricting goals are most important

to you. I want this process to be transparent and inclusive.

In this newsletter, I will discuss some challenges that we face this year, and I will share some accomplishments. Rockland County has no problem bigger than its ability to solve it, and I look forward to working with elected officials and citizens this year to do just that.



## Hopper Coming to Hopper House

From May 21—July 17, 2011, The Hopper House in Nyack will host an exhibition titled *Edward Hopper, Prelude: The Nyack Years*. The exhibition will feature works on loan from the Whitney Museum, including early paintings, drawings, watercolors and memorabilia of Edward Hopper, who lived and worked in Nyack. This is an incredibly exciting event that will bring many benefits.

The exhibition is certain to have a tremendous economic impact. In 2005, *The Gates, Central Park* exhibit in New York City generated \$254 million in economic impact for the city. We won't rival those numbers, but the Hopper exhibit will attract visitors from all over the world to Nyack, bringing revenue to many of our hotels, restaurants and downtown businesses.

But it's about more than just money. Support for the arts is vital for the soul of the citizenry, and we are fortunate indeed for all of our organizations which bring visual and performing arts to Rockland County.

## Addressing the Budget

In December, the Legislature completed its annual budget review, and it was the most difficult one in recent memory.

Rockland County relies on revenue from several sources, most of all from sales tax, but in this economic downturn, revenues have fallen sharply, adding to the deficit.

In October, the County Executive presented us with a proposal for a \$711 million budget that included a county property tax increase of \$24 per year for the typical homeowner. My colleagues and I on the Budget Committee worked productively to reduce the budget and cut the proposed tax increase to \$12 per year. I made sure that funding for the many programs and organizations which serve our residents remained in the final budget.

I was especially vigilant in making sure that our law enforcement programs get the money they need. One of the primary responsibilities of government is keeping its citizens safe, and that is no less the case during difficult economic times.

As dawn broke on Thursday, January 20, police made twelve drug-related arrests in Orangetown and Nyack, many of them in my district. It was the culmination of a six-month undercover investigation that involved the Rockland County Drug Task Force and the Rockland County Intelligence Unit, among other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

In this year's budget, I worked to guarantee that the Task Force got almost a million dollars for its work, and the Intelligence Unit got \$1.6 million. Again, I know these are hard times, but that is no excuse for unsafe streets, and I am proud of the work our law enforcement has done.



### Children Always Come First

The recent death of a baby allegedly at her father's hands underscores the importance of making known the many County services to help prevent such tragedies. Child Protective Services can be alerted by calling 845-364-3512. Many government and not-for-profit programs help families with the stress of raising children, prevention and treatment of substance abuse, bullying, discrimination and other behavioral issues.

Fifteen years ago, I founded Rockland 21C, which has established forty Family Resource Centers. These centers provide information on raising children in safe, healthy environments.

Rockland Parent-Child Center helps parents with the stress of child rearing by welcoming them into a community of families confronting similar issues, providing support and a sense of belonging.

The Nyack Center serves over 2000 people each year with programs that engage children in a safe, caring environment. CAN-DLE, another vital organization, works to prevent substance abuse and violence among youth with prevention and support programs.

Information on these programs and more are available at the InfoRock website [www.informationrockland.com](http://www.informationrockland.com) and hotline 845-364-2020.

### Affordable Quality Education in Rockland

Many young people struggle to balance the need for academic advancement with the skyrocketing costs of college.

Here in Rockland we are fortunate to have Rockland Community College, an institu-

tion that "can open the door to possibilities—a door that, once opened, sparks excitement as you learn new and different things. Inspired by all that exists to learn, you can now choose the path that appeals to your interests and your sense of wonder."

RCC is experiencing its highest enrollment since 1992, including 500 high school students taking college courses through RCC. From honors students who want an affordable stepping-stone to a four-year college to adults who need a degree to fulfill career goals, RCC makes it possible—and we in government need to ensure that our financial sponsorship continues to grow.



### Project Tomorrow: Aging in Place

Attention to the changing demographics of Rockland, which show that Rockland's senior population is growing at a rate that far outpaces state and national averages, caused me to begin a two-year study to explore the challenges faced by many older residents and to present realistic solutions on how to make Rockland a more elder-friendly community. Working with and listening to seniors, policy makers and service providers about the lack of affordable housing, limited transportation options, high taxes, and wellness challenges led to the comprehensive report *Project Tomorrow: Ag-*

*ing in Place*. Released last fall, it provides in-depth analysis of many problems our seniors face and offers recommendations for policy changes, legislation and common-sense ways to alter our physical and social interactions that can improve the lives of our seniors and make Rockland more livable for all our residents. Seniors provide a significant part of the inter-generational fabric that strengthens our community.

The full report, *Project Tomorrow: Aging in Place*, can be found at [www.co.rockland.ny.us/Legislature/ProjectTomorrow.htm](http://www.co.rockland.ny.us/Legislature/ProjectTomorrow.htm).

tion that offers an affordable college education of the highest caliber. Under the direction of Dr. Cliff Wood and a dedicated Board of Trustees, RCC has expanded its services, facilities and outreach. Speaking at the College's 50<sup>th</sup> Commencement Ceremony in 2010, I called RCC a place

### Rockland's 100-Year-Old Bard

Gussie Levine, who just turned 100 years old, has recently written her third book for children, *The Big Red Umbrella*. She was ninety-six when she wrote her first. On January 10, she held a signing for her latest work, and all proceeds from her sales and signings are contributed to St. Jude's Children's Hospital for Cancer Re-

search. Gussie was a teacher in New York City for many years.

I recently presented Gussie with a Legislative Distinguished Service Award. (I also bought all three of her books for my newest grandson.) May we all remain as vital and happy as Gussie, and I feel safe in saying we all look forward to her next book.



I value your input. Call with questions or concerns at (845) 638-5100 or e-mail at [CornellH@co.rockland.ny.us](mailto:CornellH@co.rockland.ny.us). Mail letters to: Rockland County Legislature 11 New Hempstead Road New City, NY 10956