Nonprofits in Westchester are Part of the Fabric of our Society, New President Says

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The role nonprofit organizations play in the civic and social lives of citizens is often overlooked, with heavier emphasis placed on the domains of government and business. With the election of Anahaita Kotval to President of the board of Nonprofit Westchester (NPW), the River Journal took the opportunity to meet Ms. Kotval and her counterpart, NPW’s Executive Director Jan Fisher, to discuss some aspects of the nonprofit sector and its impact on the lives of Westchester County residents.

A Tarrytown resident, Ms. Kotval began her two-year term as NPW’s president in January 2020. In her day job she is Chief Executive Officer at Lifting Up Westchester, a nonprofit which serves the homeless and other extremely low-income people. Earlier, she worked in the securities industry at RBS as a Managing Director, and at the Securities and Exchange Commission as a Senior Trial Counsel, before moving to the nonprofit sector in 2011.

Some might see this as a radical career switch, but not Ms. Kotval. “It’s always been an interest of mine and I’ve been involved in a number of nonprofits, mostly on the indigent services side of things,” she explained.

Nonprofit Westchester describes itself as a membership organization dedicated solely to advancing and advocating for the needs and interests of the county’s nonprofit sector and the people and communities they serve.

The leadership at NPW has been in transition since 2019. Jan Fisher was appointed executive director in September 2019 and the rest of the executive board in January this year. Both Ms. Fisher and Ms. Kotval are interested in building on and growing the work which NPW has been doing in the county for almost a decade. “There’s a tremendous opportunity to bring organizations together to understand how better we can collaborate,” Ms. Fisher said.

To deepen the work of the nonprofit sector, NPW would like nonprofit organizations in the county to know that they offer more than just educational and networking opportunities. “We want them to understand that we can be a voice for change when we’re dealing with the
outside world, whether it’s the business community, or the legislature, or the county executive,” said Ms. Fisher.

One of the priorities on NPW’s 2020 public policy agenda is supporting on-going advocacy for legislation in a host of areas including, but not limited to, affordable housing, and youth and childhood development. Of over-arching significance this year is the 2020 Census. NPW is spearheading efforts to allocate county funds to nonprofits for census outreach, and after the input they received from some of their members NPW is helping the county executive to ensure disabled persons are able to take part in the census.

Ms. Kotval and Ms. Fisher also answered the common misconception many people have that nonprofits are here to serve the poor by pointing out that many things Westchester residents enjoy and care about, such as libraries, museums, parks, culture, festivals, after-school programs and so on, are carried out by nonprofits.

“The most important message that I’d want to send out is the notion of a comprehensive society where everybody is given the opportunity to thrive, and that the nonprofit sector really serves the lowest income person and the most successful person in Westchester. The notion of something that’s part of the fabric of our society, of something that is necessary to our shared and collective health as opposed to the idea of something benevolent that some of us do for others of us,” Ms. Kotval said.

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