

FOCL POINT

Our Survey of Friends Groups Shows Some Surprising Answers

Carl Nawrocki
FOCL Board Member

Many Friends groups feel lost about who or how to advocate or don't even think it is their role.

This is according to a survey that FOCL did this fall of Friends groups and library staff about library advocacy and awareness activities.

The survey was designed to gain a better understanding of if, when and how Friends groups advocate for their libraries. Also, the survey asked for details of their library awareness activities.

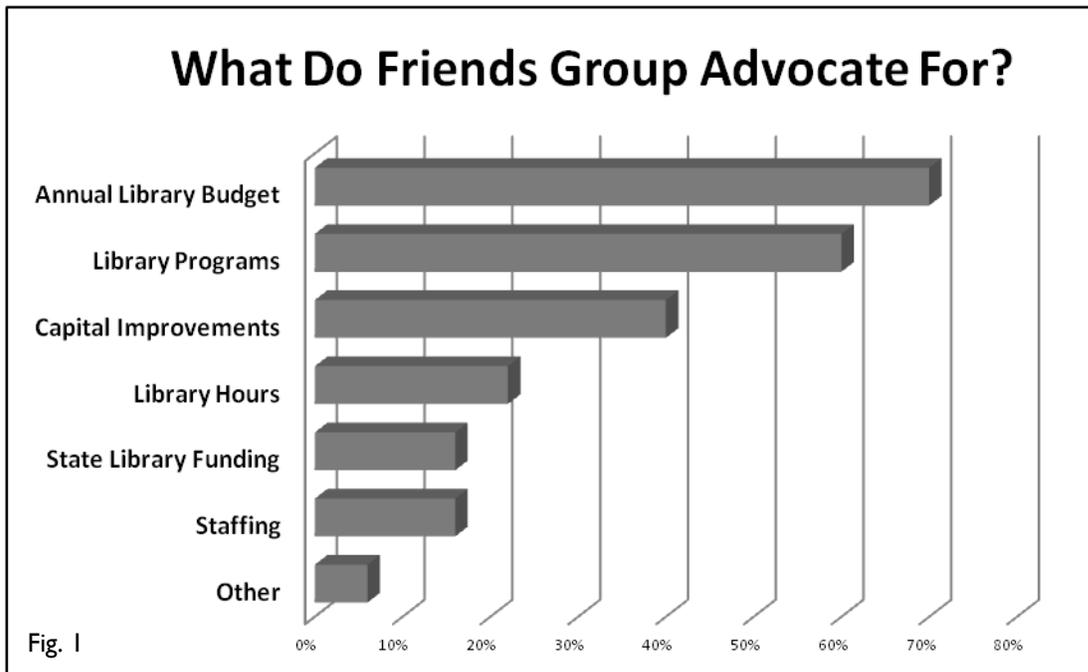


Fig. 1

Ninety-eight Friends, library staff and board members — representing all sizes of communities — completed the

online survey. Two-thirds of the respondents came from municipal libraries and the remaining from

(Continued on page 2)

You will find this issue of *FOCL Point* different from previous newsletters. The FOCL Board decided to devote a significant portion to the subject of *Advocacy for Libraries*.

With budget deficits occurring on all levels, funding for libraries is being drastically reduced. These reductions often result in elimination of staff positions, cuts in operational hours and slashes to spending for books and materials.

It has never been more crucial for Friends groups to be active and vocal advocates for their libraries.

FOCL hopes this newsletter will increase your awareness and help you understand the importance of being an advocate for your library. We have asked Kate Byroade, president of the Connecticut Library Association, and Mary Etter, co-chair of the association's Legislative Advocacy Committee, to share their experiences with advocacy, either on the local level or state wide.

About This Issue:

In addition, this issue reports results from the FOCL Advocacy and Awareness Survey and reprints an article outlining do's and don'ts on advocacy activities and limits on spending on advocacy for non-profits in Connecticut.

We hope the contents of this newsletter will initiate spirited conversations and inspire Friends groups and library lovers statewide to get out there and be vocal and tireless advocates for our libraries.

— FOCL Board of Directors

Survey, continued

(Continued from page 1)

association libraries. This is consistent with the libraries in Connecticut.

Seventy percent of the respondents reported that their Friends group engages in some form of library advocacy. Figure 1 shows the reasons that were given.

Local advocacy is mainly performed in support of the municipal budget and library programs, so it is not surprising that Friends primarily advocate to municipal leaders, including the board of finance. Friends also advocate trustees and, to a much lesser degree, state representatives

and legislative bodies as shown in Figure 2.

Although more than 70% of respondents engage in advocacy, survey data shows that plans are

With Whom Do Friends Groups Advocate?

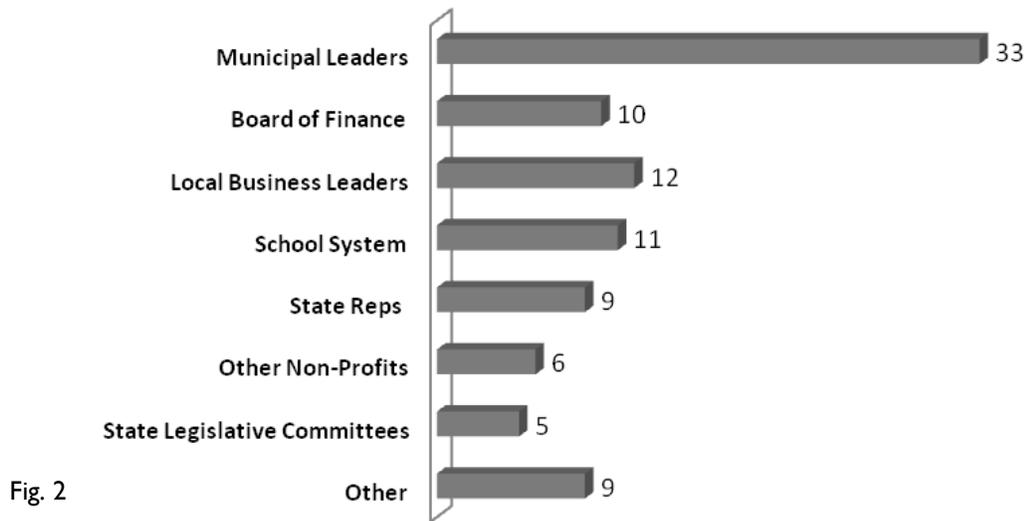


Fig. 2

How Does Your Friends Group Advocate?

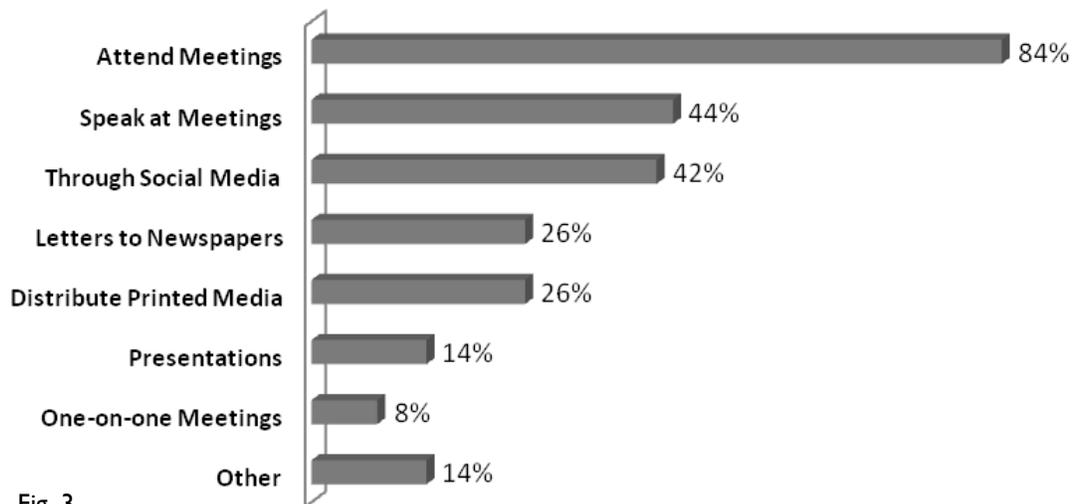


Fig. 3

in place only 30% of the time. While the percentage is low, it is somewhat understandable as most municipal governments have an established timeline for the budget

development. So the who and when to meet is established by the municipality.

Survey, continued

(Continued from page 2)

This is borne out in Figure 3, which shows that most of the advocacy is performed by attending and speaking at municipal meetings.

Most groups believe that their efforts in supporting the

library were successful more than half the time. However, there are some major exceptions in how Friends are involved in library advocacy as a comment shown in comment from a Friends group:

“We have not been involved in advocacy efforts for some years now, primarily because the library has not encouraged our involvement

through timely collaboration. We have not been informed of an advocacy plan on the part of the library, although we suspect that at the very least the library has one.”

So what obstacles stand in the way of Friends groups advocating for their library? More than 50% of Friends groups say that there is

no plan on how or whom to advocate to.

Other groups feel that the purpose of the Friends group is to fund raise and the library director and board should perform library advocacy.

Library advocacy is primarily performed during the annual budget time by the library

Friend groups need to recognize the need to perform advocacy in municipal meetings. Why? To quote the famous bank robber Willie Sutton, when asked why he robbed banks, "Because that is where the money is."

director, the board of trustees and, to a lesser degree, by Friends groups. While library directors have made it known that they would like more advocacy from the Friends, the directors have not presented plans asking for

Are the Friends Part of the Advocacy Plan?

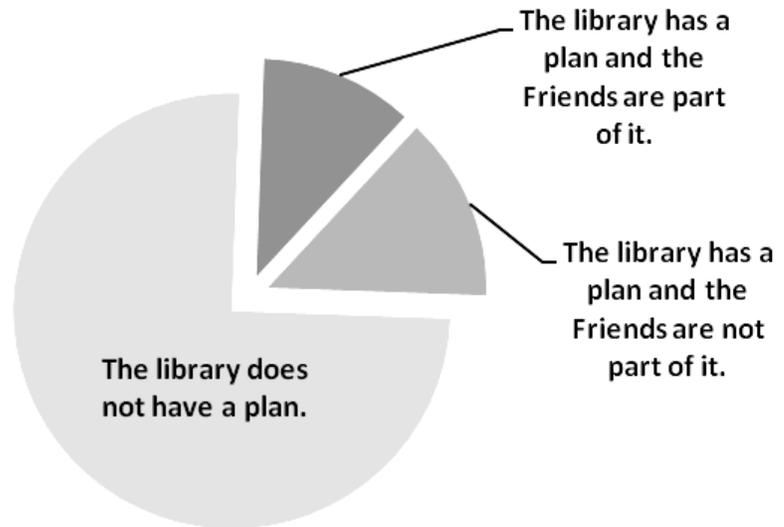


Fig. 4

what they would like the Friends to do.

Friend groups need to recognize the need to perform advocacy in municipal meetings. Why? To quote the famous bank robber Willie Sutton, when asked why he robbed banks, "Because that is where the money is."

The survey asked about activities the Friends use to build community awareness of the library's value to the community. As reported earlier, about 70% of those taking the survey perform some form of library awareness activities in their community.

While not as highly ranked as speaking in public in favor of a library budget, getting broad community support for the library and Friends group is still very important. Ninety-four percent say they participate in activities

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Friends Around the State

We encourage all Newsletters editors to put us on their mailing lists so we can have a rich exchange of information to pass on to fellow Friends organizations. If you'd like to see your news here please put Friends of Connecticut Libraries, Middletown Library Service Center, 786 South Main St., Middletown, CT 06457 on your newsletter mailing list, or send by email to friendsctlibraries@gmail.com. Note: We only include events run, sponsored, or funded by Friends Groups. To make our job easier, in your newsletters, please include that information when describing events.

Friends of the James Blackstone Memorial Library in Branford have been researching their history. They have a list of their founding members including Alexine Wallace, one of the original book sorters who was active until two years ago (and has provided a write-up of her early experiences). And they discovered that the first book sale, 30 years ago, netted \$400. They are reviewing minutes of board meetings, Marble Columns (their newsletter), pictures and other media dating back to the beginning.

Friends of the Bethel Public Library have been sponsoring the First Book Program, which celebrates a child's first library card by providing each new card holder with a bright yellow and red Bethel Public Library tote bag and a book. The Friends also provided the funding to start a children's Spanish picture book collection, which has allowed the library to start a Spanish story time.

Friends of the New Britain Public Library, because of their gen-

erosity and hard work, were responsible for a variety of programming at the main library and the Jefferson Branch during the summer. Included were magicians, music, dancing, puppets and animals. In addition, Friends rewarded kids with a free children's book of their choice when they signed up for summer reading.



Friends of the Simsbury Public Library took a bus trip to the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme where they visited Florence's home, which served as a boarding house for young artists from New York City, and the surrounding grounds on which was exhibited the Wee Faerie Village. They finished their trip with lunch at the Bee and Thistle Inn next door.

The Friends also presented a Women's Thriller/Suspense Author panel with five award-winning, critically acclaimed, best-selling writers. The panel was moderated by Vera Gibbons, financial journalist and



founder of nonpoliticalnews.com, and included Lea Carpenter author of the espionage thriller *Red*,

White, Blue; Lynne Constantine, who with her sister Valerie is Liv Constantine author of the thriller *The Last Mrs. Parrish*; Aimee Molloy author of the thriller *The Perfect Mother*; Hank Phillippi Ryan author of the chilling *Trust Me*; and Wendy Walker author of the thriller *Emma in the Night*.

The Circle of Friends of the Groton Public Library held a Winter Bazaar in the library. They rented space to talented and creative artists and crafters from the local community, as well as to



popular vendors. The bazaar featured handcrafted goods including wreaths,

wooden signs, quilts, scarves, photos, cards, jewelry and stained glass as well as products from vendors such as LulaRoe, Pampered Chef and Usborne Books.

The Junior Friends of the Groton Public Library collected leftover Halloween candy to send



to service members through Operation Gratitude. They also collected new/unopened cans and bags of dog and cat food for the Groton Pet Food Locker.

Survey, continued

(Continued from page 3)

such as Tree Lighting, Trunk-or-Treat and the all-important Used Book Sale.

All these activities bring the library into the minds of participants and the greater community. The uses of printed and social media to promote the library are very popular methods. Awareness activities are mostly performed in conjunction with other local non-profits and businesses.

Promoting the library to the school system and home-schooled students got a low response, which is strange as school-age children as a group should be prime users of the library. The major barriers cited of not conducting awareness activities, is again that Friends feel that their primary mission is to raise funds.

So what did we learn from the survey?

A large number library stakeholders — 70% — are involved in library advocacy and awareness activities. Library stakeholders' primary focus is on the support of the annual budget and capital campaigns.

Friends, continued

(Continued from page 4)

Friends of the Lucy Robbins Welles Library in Newington sponsored local author and former town manager Frank Connolly presenting his recent novel *Hidden*



Agendas: Inside Town Hall. He discussed his book, its background and the process of writing and getting published.

When compared to activity supporting the local library budgets, there is little activity supporting the state library budget.

In either case, there is little planning on advocating for either budget. And where there is planning, the Friends are not likely to be involved. However, lack of planning has not prevented advocacy from taking place even if all stakeholders (Friends) might not be involved.

Library awareness activities are being widely conducted in communities via local events and fundraisers.

Not many activities are conducted with schools and home-schoolers.

Some opportunities

- Place library advocacy and awareness activities on meeting agendas.
- Ask questions on advocacy plans and awareness activities as part of the comprehensive summary that each library reports annually to the state.
- Meet annually with your state representatives, especially after an election.

Doesn't Someone You Know Deserve An Award?

It's not too early to think about submitting an award to the Friends of the Connecticut Library.

It's true that the submission deadline is months away. However, if you don't put the information together from projects or achievements from individuals you did last spring, summer and fall, something will come up and it won't get done.

You all do such great things to advance your libraries and your Friends groups. Your group deserves to be recognized!

And what better way to thank that individual in your group who does so much, time and time again.

Think about it now and when we notify you early in 2019 you won't have to say that you don't have time to gather the information.

You and your group deserve it!



Advocate, Advocate, Then Advocate Some More for Your Library

*Kate Byroade
President of the
Connecticut Library Association*

This fall's FOCL survey of Friends and library staff about library advocacy was revealing. In two prior surveys, library directors reported that advocacy from Friends is desirable, needed and expected, and just as important to them as fundraising efforts.

However, Friends reported that advocacy was not a role they saw as important.

It's clear that the disconnect between library directors and Friends groups around advocacy needs to be resolved.

A significant finding of the current survey is that nearly half of the respondents skipped all the surveys questions about advocacy.

Advocacy is too important to be done by only a small fraction of library stakeholders.

And of those who did answer those questions, more than 70% report that their libraries don't have an advocacy plan.

Of the ones who do, another 10% of respondents report that their local Friends group is not included in it.

Advocacy is too important to be done by only a small fraction of library stakeholders.

Clearly it's time to spread the



Kate Byroade, president of the Connecticut Library Association and director of the Cragin Memorial Library in Colchester, says advocacy is vitally important for Friends Groups who want to see their libraries healthy and strong.

word among all library lovers— Friends, trustees, directors and library staff members— throughout the state about advocacy and how to do it.

Toward that end the American Library Association (ALA) offers an Advocacy Bootcamp to train and empower library stakeholders to develop confidence with advocacy tools and techniques.

Members of the staff of the Connecticut Library Consortium have gone through this training and will be providing opportunities to connect with

library groups across the state. Next fall's conference of the New England Library Association will provide a half day of ALA's training as a preconference program.

The American Library Association offers an Advocacy Bootcamp to train and empower library stakeholders to develop confidence with advocacy tools and techniques.

Local Friends groups can support this effort by sponsoring someone's attendance at this and other conferences and devoting

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Kate Byroade, now president of the Connecticut Library Association, spoke at a rally at the State Capitol in 2015, just one of the times library services were in danger.

Advocate, continued

(Continued from page 6)

meeting time to discussing advocacy.

In the past, advocacy has often been on an “as needed” basis — to support a building project, to turn out to support a budget, or when a library service is on the chopping block.

Today we don’t have the luxury to wait around for a special occasion. Advocacy is needed every day.

Advocacy is needed every day.

Connecticut’s state budget is billions of dollars in deficit.

Many often painful cuts have been made and will continue to be made and will trickle down to public, school and public college and university libraries, eroding resources, staff and services.

The Connecticut Library Association, the Association of Connecticut Library Boards and FOCL will work together to build everyone’s skills and toolkits.

Please send staff and volunteers to learn how to do it effectively and consistently.

Libraries Can Count More Than A Few Friends In All the Right Places

Mary Etter

Co-chair of the Connecticut Library Association Legislative Committee and Director of the South Windsor Library

Librarians know a lot of key people in the advocacy ranks: Friends of the Library!

The Connecticut Library Association works with the lobbying firm Gallo & Robinson to make the case for libraries at the Capitol. Kate Robinson and Joe Grabarz, our closest colleagues, remind us repeatedly that we are in a unique and powerful position when bringing our needs to the Legislature.

They point out that we have a presence (at least one public library, as well as school libraries, academic libraries, and special libraries in hospitals, museums, historical societies, and even businesses) in every community in the state.

We are valued, even treasured, as institutions that provide free

We [libraries] are valued, even treasured, as institutions that provide free resources to people of all ages, without regard for income level, social status, or “special” condition of any kind.

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Mary Etter, director of the South Windsor Library and co-chair of the Connecticut Library Association’s Legislative Committee, says communities sometimes forget all that libraries do to make them strong, vibrant, welcoming places.

Our services extend both beyond our walls via outreach programs of all kinds and “to” our walls via meeting spaces, programs and materials to lend and to make available electronically. These are often available 24/7 and almost always available more hours per week than other community services.

We are enthusiastic service providers in safe, comfortable environments and most often have no detractors.

Why do we need advocates?

Over the course of more than a century, public libraries have become part of the invisible support of our communities.

The specifics of how a library and its services are supported are simply not considered. The fact that a great deal of funding for libraries comes through one or more political channels comes as a surprise to many users.

The reality is that budgets must be defended *annually*.

Legislative decisions affect:

- library governing practices
- statewide services such as reciprocal borrowing
- funding for the State Library’s role as the go-to resource for the

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You're never too young to advocate. The children above appeared at a rally at the State Capitol in 2015.

Friends, continued

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legislature, the court system, and local libraries and governments

These are simply not parts of our daily thinking.

Friends can help bring these concepts to light for their neighbors at home and can likewise help legislators understand how their actions in Hartford affect their communities on a personal level.

The American Library Association's *Library Advocate's Handbook* points out that "The most important person to any elected official is a voting constituent."

That means *you!*

I hope you will visit the website of the Connecticut Library Association

(www.ctlibraryassociation.org) and sign up as a library advocate. This will be helpful no matter how extensive your own efforts can comfortably be.

You will receive updates as legislation relating to libraries makes

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its way through the process during the session.

You will receive alerts when bills need extra support (sometimes as simple as being a "part of the crowd" at a public hearing where showing the magni-



Mary Etter collects signatures on a "Libraries Change Lives" poster at the Capitol.

tude of public interest in a topic is important).

You will have access to fact sheets that give you answers to questions your neighbors and friends — some of whom probably represent you in the State House or Senate — may have.

You will be in a position to give your legislator a call asking him or her to support or oppose a proposal before a key committee.

The Connecticut Library Association information may remind you to share an especially meaningful experience in a library with an elected official, just so *they* can be reminded that the library services their votes support have real effects on people's lives in the community they represent.

Library service is personal, and you can play an important role in sustaining it today and in the future.



Priya Morganstern is a lawyer who directs Pro Bono Partnership Inc., a group that provides free legal service to nonprofit groups. She explained the legal issues of being a 501 (c) (3) at a FOCL Boot Camp in April 2013.

If I Advocate as a 501 (c)(3) Non-profit, Am I Breaking a Law?

*Carl Nawrocki
FOCL Board Member*

In the course of asking FOCL members to complete the Advocacy and Awareness Survey, we received several e-mails stating that as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, they were prohibited from advocating for their library.

The authors of the e-mails believed that engaging in advocacy could

jeopardize their organization's non-profit status.

To address this concern, we are reprinting an article from Focal Point that addresses the advocacy concern.

The article reports on a presentation by Priya Morganstern, a lawyer with the Pro Bono Partnership, who spoke at a FOCL Boot Camp at the University of Hartford:

Of course Friends groups are going to advocate for their

libraries. Their purpose is to promote and support libraries.

But if you are going to advocate by trying to get a certain law passed or an addition built onto your library, you had better know where you stand legally.

That was the message of Priya Morganstern, a lawyer who directs Pro Bono Partnership Inc., a group that provides free legal service to nonprofit groups. She

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501 (c)(3), continued

(Continued from page 10)

explained the legal issues at Boot Camp in April 2013.

“Business lawyers are looking for pro bono volunteer work,” Morganstern said. Most law firms do a certain amount of free work each year, so this gives them a way to find clients.

As a 501(c)(3), a Friends group is allowed to spend 20% of its income lobbying for legislation, she said, such as paying someone to talk with legislators about increasing funding for interlibrary loans. (Make sure your group IS a 501(c)(3), Morganstern said.)

If your group is working to get the public to vote a certain way, such as to increase library funding, you would be allowed to spend 25% of your income.

Friends may also do voter education or get-out-the-vote

In answer to a question about whether the law bars a Friends officer from speaking out at a town meeting, Morganstern said, “No, not if you disclose that you’re an officer of that organization. That’s what you should be doing.”

programs as long as these programs do not take sides. If your group hosts a candidates’ forum, you must invite all viable candidates and have an impartial moderator.

But a 501(c)(3) group cannot campaign to get someone elected.

Individuals in your group could do this, but they must say they are volunteering as individuals, not as members of your Friends group.

In answer to a question about whether the law bars a Friends officer from speaking out at a town meeting, Morganstern said, “No, not if you disclose that you’re an officer of that organization. That’s what you should be doing.” And if your Friends

group spends money on ballot issues, such as expanding the library, it must file with the State Election Enforcement Commission, Morganstern said.

You must also check if your town charter has rules on nonprofits registering with them before lobbying for a position.

Morganstern said you don’t want to run afoul of someone who says, “That group working on that ballot initiative? I’m going to make sure they’ve dotted their I’s and crossed their T’s.”

When in doubt, call Pro Bono Partnership at 860 541-4951 or, in Fairfield County, 914 328-0674. If you call the Hartford office, Morganstern said to ask for her.

You can also read more on their website at www.probonopartner.org.



When Morganstern spoke at the FOCL Boot Camp, many people paid close attention.



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Newsletter edited
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