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Salerno Takes Kiwanis' Helm

by Jim Gerweck 09/25/2010 12:01 a.m.

Hilda Salerno could be called an "über-volunteer" in Norwalk — and she doesn't even live in the city. She's corporate secretary of the Norwalk Education Foundation and treasurer of the Women's Entrepreneurial Network. But her deepest involvement is with the Norwalk Kiwanis Club. In a gala event Friday night, she was installed as the group's president.

Salerno's commitment to Norwalk is surprising because she only works in town, commuting from West Haven. "I just love this city," Salerno said. And she loves the Kiwanis Club.

"I've been involved since 2006," she said. "I was looking for a service club that supported children through scholarships and after-school programs, and Kiwanis fit the bill. It continuously gives back to the community."

In researching the history of the Norwalk chapter, Salerno was intrigued to learn that a Judge Kehoe started it 90 years ago, and it was one of the first chapters to allow female members. Kehoe had a vacation home in Bermuda and started a chapter there, too, which explains why that group belongs to the New England region of Kiwanis.

The Norwalk chapter is rich and storied. It helped open the city's YMCA and was instrumental in establishing a food shelter. In 1990, the group donated \$40,000 to purchase a fire safety trailer, which visits schools to teach children what to do in fires.

One of Salerno's presidential goals is to re-establish programs in the schools. "We used to have Key Clubs and Builder's Clubs," she said. "One of my objectives is to bring those back."

Another focus is to increase the organization's membership, which hovers at about two-dozen. "What I know is that in today's world there aren't enough people volunteering their time and efforts," she said. "Everybody's busier than ever, but it's important to make time to give back."

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