

4/16/99

A new generation of leaders can't wait to tackle the future

By TRACY DIINA

If you haven't noticed, the bridge to the 21st century is currently being navigated by a group of enthusiastic young Western New Yorkers dedicated to promoting and increasing civic participation among the younger generation.



Created to fill a conspicuous void — the unified voice of the younger generation — the 21st Century Club is well on its way to implementing an ambitious agenda designed to spark the interest of younger people and elicit participation in the very events shaping the course of Western New York.

When we first came together a little over a year ago, we were tired of the culture of negativity that continuously detailed the numbers of young people leaving Western New York. Quite frankly, we were all affected by this as we watched our family members and friends leave Western New York for the proverbial greener pastures.

But what we saw is that despite the supposed "brain drain," there was a substantial group of younger people, passionate about Western New York, who had decided to stay here and make a difference. So we began in earnest, bonded by our common love for this area and inspired by the opportunity to unite the younger generation into a catalyst for change.

With our mission to promote and advance the role of young people, we began a massive campaign to reach out to Western New York's "best and brightest" as a means to grow a group poised to assume the leadership of the 21st century. Our members are diverse and dynamic, numbering over 100 and growing every day.

To date, our activities include several successful speaker series highlighting different issues affecting Western New York. Our first speaker series included a State of the City address from Mayor Masiello, who detailed city projects and plans.

We have also hosted a Charter Review Speaker Series and a Smart Growth Forum, which included both Assemblyman Sam Hoyt and State Sen. Mary Lou Rath. Smart Growth

is an issue adopted last year by the 21st Century Club, prompting us to craft our first resolution sent to the Western New York delegation, in support of smart-growth legislation.

We continue to explore and evaluate many issues. We have held, or are planning, speaker series and forums on School Board candidates, the Peace Bridge and an intense outreach effort focusing on voter registration and voter education.

We expect to be a popular fixture at many summer events, so look for us as we bring our show on the road. It is important to note that the 21st Century Club is a non-partisan group. Our goal is to inform and promote participation, plain and simple.

Another activity that we are undertaking is a Volunteer Corner, where we publicize volunteer opportunities. We have already assisted Meals on Wheels, and will assist WNED's pledge drive and Literacy Volunteers' Coffee & Chocolates event.

As with any group of young vibrant people, there is also a social component to the club. We host regular happy hours as a means of networking and connecting with like-minded younger people. We also hosted a Happy Hour with the New Millennium Group, another organization formed to encourage participation among younger people. While the 21st Century Club and the New Millennium Group are separate and distinct organizations, we have enthusiastically agreed to work together to effect change.

So, for all those who have bemoaned the plight of Western New York, be encouraged! The emerging movement of the younger generation is gaining momentum, energy and support. We are the leaders of the 21st century and, as such, we are moving forward with a vengeance.

TRACY DIINA is president of the 21st Century Club.

For writer guidelines for columns appearing in this space, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Opinion Pages Guidelines, The Buffalo News, P.O. Box 100, Buffalo, N.Y. 14240.