

## Taking CARE of each other

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Editorial: Predicted months ago by media sources to be among the hardest hit by the economic downturn, Darien and its residents are beginning to show signs of struggle. With the second highest number of residents, nationwide, who are employed in the financial services industry, some of the town's families now face joblessness, financial failure and hopelessness.

But for the same reason our town faces challenges that others might not, Darien also has opportunities that others do not. This town is lucky in many ways because it is filled with a community of residents who can truly sympathize with their neighbors. We need look no farther away than our own back yards to see others who face the same problems and experience the same fears. Perhaps because of this mutual understanding, many community members realized that they needed to come up with ways to support and sustain their struggling friends. Working under the CARE banner (Darien's initiative to create a Community of Accountability and Respect for Everyone), representatives from the Human Services Planning Council, The Community Fund, Social Services, the clergy, the YWCA and the schools have come up with a number of ideas that they hope will relieve tensions and ease the minds of Darien's residents.

The CARE group will have four seminars in March, called "Navigating in Tough Times." The first two will be career-management seminars, beginning Tuesday, March 3, from 9:30 to 11 a.m., and then another one on Wednesday, March 11, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. Both will take place at the Darien Community Association, 274 Middlesex Road.

Included in these helpful sessions will be information on finding new jobs, resume development, networking strategies, career changes and interviewing skills, among other job-related areas of focus.

The next two seminars, focusing on "Recession-proofing Your Family," will take place Saturday, March 7, and Wednesday, March 18, both from 9:30 to 11 a.m. The first will take place at Darien High School, while the second will be at the Darien Library.

Topics in these sessions will include strategies on effective parenting, keeping relationships strong and meeting your family's needs, and participants will be shown various resources that are available to them. Representatives from the Child Guidance Center, Family Centers/Center for Hope, Person-to-Person and Darien Social services will be on-hand.

The YWCA will continue its "Discover Yourself" seminars, which began earlier this month. The March 6 session will focus on "Job Search Communications," focusing on cover letters. Then on March 13, participants can focus on "Becoming Visible to Employers" and "Nailing the Interview." Both workshops will take place at the YWCA of Darien/Norwalk, 49 Old Kings Highway N., from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Individual workshop fees are \$20 for members, \$25 for non-members.

Beginning March 3, the YWCA will launch a new series of workshops, "Money Matters: Surviving Difficult Financial Times," which will be co-sponsored by the Financial Planning Association of Fairfield County.

Covering a variety of financial topics, the free series will be held every Tuesday this month at the Darien Library from 7:30 to 9 p.m.

The first in the series will focus on "Money Psychology and its Impact on Cash Management and Investment Risk Tolerance."

For information on the "Navigating in Tough Times" sessions, contact the Community Fund of Darien at 655-8775. For information on the YWCA programs, call 655-2535.

The hope is that programs like these will not only teach people how to live within this current economic climate, but to also open the lines of communication and give people an outlet to express their fears and frustrations.

Right now, many among us might be embarrassed to admit that our pockets aren't as deep as in years (or even months) past, and that we must now seek outside assistance. Programs like these, which gather together our neighbors and friends in an environment of support, are fantastic ways to combat our growing financial insecurities. These programs may not be able to restore what many have already lost, but they can help people find a way to preserve what they still have - or if that's not possible, they can show people where to go for help. This feeling of insecurity is something that's new for many Darienites, and many aren't used to asking for help. Hopefully, knowing that there are so many others experiencing the same problems will help us all not only reach out to others, but to accept a helping hand if necessary. "It's not a process that people are used to in this community," Superintendent of Schools Donald Fiftal said. "People [in Darien] are very inexperienced at being needy." The truth is, the need is greater everywhere, even where we least expected it: in our own homes. We're lucky to live in such an understanding community, where organizations are sensitive to the fact that for many, this is the first time they've had to ask for help. These organizations provide anonymity and discretion when needed. They also provide forums for us to gather as a community when needed.

Take advantage of the help that they are offering over the next few months by attending one of their seminars. Also, be willing to take advantage of the services this town provides through its departments and organizations - everything from mental health to hunger can be covered without worrying about the cost.

Those who don't need help can certainly provide it. Donating items like clothing and food are a good start, but donating services is another way to reach out. Be willing to offer your expertise to others who may need it. There are many talented professionals in this area whose skills should be shared.

Trying to get make it alone may be a source of pride, but pride can be as harmful as it is empowering. As a community, we shouldn't be afraid to lean on each other and work together to make it through the long journey to financial stability.