



Kent County News

~ A Direct Descendant Of The Chestertown Spy, Established 1793 ~

By Peter Heck
Staff Writer

CHESTERTOWN – The World Café may sound like a trendy coffee shop. In fact, it's a conversation that might change the whole face of the town. The goal: to define what Chestertown is, and what it might become.

Mayor Margo Bailey says she hopes that 300 Chestertown residents will show up for the meeting, set for June 15, 6:30 p.m. at the Chestertown Fire Hall on Maple Avenue. Light refreshments will be served beginning at 5:30. But the real business will be a series of informal conversations between various members of the community, who may not even have met before they sit down together at the meeting.

Bailey said in e-mail May 26, "Many of us are privileged to be included and actively involved in Chestertown and all its wonderful activities. However, many do not feel included and have a different view of our town." She sees the World Café as a chance to find out what those different views are and to get input from all segments of the community, Bailey said.

Sponsored by the town of Chestertown and the Washington College Center for the Environment and Society, the town meeting is organized by Jennifer Hicks. Hicks, who has put together similar events for other towns in the Delmarva area, had approached Bailey in 2008 about a long-term visioning process called "Future Search" that has been tried in a number of communities around the country.

Hicks told the town council that she had been approached by the League of Women Voters and the Unitarian Universalists of Chester River about generating a discussion of green issues and sustainability, two issues Bailey has championed during her tenure as mayor. However, Bailey said, the council wasn't convinced of the idea's benefits, and the project was not followed up.

Bailey said on May 27 that she had kept in touch with Hicks, who continued doing community visioning sessions. The two began discussing ways to find out what residents think about the town, what they want to see happen, and how the town can be made to work for them.

At the town council meeting December 9, 2009, Hicks presented her proposal for a World Café session, which she described as "like a Future Search on a much smaller scale." On February 16, the council approved the proposal, which has received funding from PNC Bank, Peoples Bank, and Chesapeake Bank and Trust. Since then, Hicks has been working with a planning committee of about 25 members.

Bailey asked the council to suggest a list of community members who ought to be included. The informal list included business owners, the hospital, schools, churches, senior citizens, waterfront users, employers, law enforcement and emergency services, artists, environmental groups, historic preservation groups, farmers, elected officials, WCTR, the *Kent County News*, Kent Family Center, Washington College, the Chamber of Commerce, Chester Harbor Association, Kent County Library and Kent on the Move, among many others.

Describing her goals for the World Café, Bailey recalled the time several years ago when community volunteers built the Garnett Elementary School playground. Work teams were put together according to the skills needed for the project, without regard to whether they knew each other. "And those people became *teams*," Bailey said. "They'd sit and have lunch together, and talk about things. That's the kind of spontaneous interaction I'd like to see."

Hicks defined the purpose of the meeting on her website, www.sustainabledelmarva.net: "The hope is that once the World Café is complete the energy generated from the event will motivate community

members to begin to take action on important ideas."

Hicks also said in a press release May 27, "The World Café provides an opportunity to connect a wide range of perspectives, promote listening, and build a set of common ground themes around a topic concerning many - in this case the topic of concern is 'The Future of Chestertown.'" She added, "The World Café will be a 'finger in the wind' to create a baseline of information about what is truly important to the Chestertown community - information that can be used when making decisions about issues impacting Chestertown."

For more information, e-mail jhicks@sustainabledelmarva.net or call town hall: 410-778-0500.