

Editorial & Commentary

Middletown has proven leader in charge

By VIRGINIA H. MATHEWS

Middletown has experienced a renaissance during the past eight years since Dominique Thornton was elected mayor. It was during this period that I was pondering my decision to move there, having found a senior residence, Heritage Commons, which I liked very much. At the beginning of this period, however, I had some doubts about the city itself.

I began driving up from my house in Madison to find out more about Middletown, which I learned had a new administration in 1997. Driving around, talking to people who lived there, seeing new stores and restaurants open, I saw change coming, a community on the rise that appeared more livable, more productive and interesting than it had previously appeared. I became so much more enthusiastic about the city that I moved there in 2003. The excellent Russell Library was a great draw.

Earlier in life, I had lived in New York City and later commuted from Fairfield County to the fast-paced world of publish-

ing, politics, the media. I did not intend to retire in Middletown, but to continue my lifelong work as an activist for early childhood learning, family literacy, libraries and education. Most of my work is done in my home office at Heritage Commons, with many trips to Washington, D.C., and other parts of the country as consultant and program coordinator for the Library of Congress.

Being keenly aware that good political leadership and governance is the key to the rebirth of a community, it was with great appreciation that I met the Mayor Dominique Thornton and had the opportunity to observe her "hands-on" practice and concern in supervising and supporting all the departments of municipal government that make it inhabitants safe and comfortable. The health department, its several fire department sites, the police department, small and larger businesses, the schools and the splendid Wesleyan University with which Middletown is blessed, all work together for the common good of the city and its residents.

This good working relationship between a major university and the city where it is located does not always exist. Good collaborative partnerships and communication that benefit both the university and its students and the city's public require thoughtful leadership by both parties, as well as good interpersonal relationships by the leaders.

For example, Wesleyan students, trained and supervised by the Community Services/Volunteer Office, run a day-care center for preschool children in the Travis Square Housing Project Complex; other students with the Community Action Team assist with the Northend Mentoring Program. This after-school program is greatly needed in neighborhoods where most parents and other caregivers work and cannot be at home to ensure that their children are not getting into trouble with unsafe activities during the "dangerous hours" between the close of school and homecoming adults.

I have had occasion to call upon the mayor's office for special assistance with matters in

several departments. Recently, her staff arranged a contact with the Director of Emergency Management to provide information about procedures and responses to nature-made or man-made dangers. The seniors in our residence were relieved to know of the thought and planning that have gone into preparations that have been made to safeguard our Middletown citizens.

Mayor Dominique Thornton is personally on the job of bringing new business into the city, and assisting business already here to meet a need vital to their customers, such as, in one instance, more convenient parking. Clean energy options and environmental protection and conservation are among the mayor's major concerns.

Middletown is on its way to becoming an even better place to live than it is now. We have the good fortune to have a proven product in this administration; to build on eight years of improvement, re-elect Dominique Thornton and her team.

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