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'Wolfpack' group hosts U.N. International Women's Day host party

By JOYCE CORRIGAN

Mar 5, 2022



Pound Ridge's Lianne Sorkin, producer of the U.N. International Women's Day event, at Bedford Playhouse. Gary Corrigan photo

If an organization called the Women's Wolfpack invites you to an event, would you dare refuse? Should you travel to the gathering in a pack? And whatever should you wear?

While it's doubtful anyone at next Tuesday's Women's Wolfpack Watch Party of the United Nations International Women's Day at the Bedford Playhouse will be outfitted in full-body wolf skin — the way Navajos once did, striving to assume lupine traits like ferocity and

courage — rest assured there will be plenty of warriors in attendance.

One of them will be Pound Ridge's Lianne Sorkin, founding member of the Women's Wolfpack, who, as co-executive producer for U.N. Women, has produced live events for the U.N. and its many agencies over the course of three decades. U.N. Women is a U.N. entity that works for gender equality and empowerment of women.

Looking every inch the refined firebrand when she arrives at the Bedford Playhouse, Ms. Sorkin is all fierce Manhattan-chic in blonde bob, black blazer, leggings, stiletto boots and dangling statement earrings that function like suncatchers. Like a traditional suncatcher, Ms. Sorkin's current role is capturing and harnessing the energy of like-minded environmentalists, eco-feminists and perhaps those who are just "climate curious."

"The Women's Wolfpack gathered for the first time this November, so this is our inaugural public outing," said Ms. Sorkin. Members include Martha Handler, current president of the Wolf Conservation Center in South Salem. "We're a group of local, environmentally and spiritually-minded women who want to explore what impact we might have on big issues" she explained. "As Rudyard Kipling once said, 'For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.' Wolves know they are stronger, smarter, and more resilient when they work in harmony with one another."

They asked how they could help Ms. Sorkin with International Women's Day, and then they looped in Bedford 2030 to help promote it.

The theme of the 2022 U.N. observance of International Women's Day is "Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow." The observance is in recognition and celebration of the women and girls who are leading the charge on climate change adaption and response, and to honor their leadership and contribution towards a sustainable future.

The 90-minute presentation boasts a roster featuring U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres; Sima Bahous, executive director of U.N. Women; Maria Reyes, climate justice activist, and Jane Goodall, U.N. Messenger of Peace. There will be a musical performance by Angelica Hale and Broadway Singers. It's girl power on a global scale.

"Look, we're in an emergency. Our house is on fire," Ms. Sorkin stated. "I hope this watch party adds to the already growing groundswell of activism here in Bedford."

One of the wolf's often-overlooked attributes is playfulness (they are, after all, ancestors of our beloved dogs) and it's certainly one of Ms. Sorkin's most striking features. She has a talent for delivering the most dire predictions in a charming and disarming way — making her delivery that much more effective.

“This week's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report is blunt,” she said, referring to the consensus findings of international scientists that the disastrous impacts of a warming climate are happening faster than we thought. “We can't save everything, but we should want to try to save all we can.” She admits that talking about the crisis in a doom-and-gloom way, as many do, is counterproductive. “It only leads to eco-grief, to paralysis, to wanting to never get out of bed,” she cautioned. “The antidote is action!” she exclaimed. “One small step is fine. It always leads to another.”

Bedford 2030 — which has been run and led by women for 12 years — jumped at the chance to be involved. “The United Nations is wise to devote International Women's Day to sustainability because women will lead the way out of this climate crisis,” offered Sarah Douglass, board vice president. “There is not enough climate action happening at the top tiers of government and in corporate boardrooms. Crucially, climate knowledge is power,” she pointed out. “According to a new report by the climate research organization Project Drawdown, girls' education and family planning in developing countries could reduce carbon by 85 gigatons by 2050.” A gigaton is equivalent to one billion metric tons.

Ms. Sorkin sees a kindred spirit in Ms. Goodall, one of the program's featured speakers, in that even in the most desperate times the legendary primatologist unfailingly delivers a message of optimism. She published “The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times” last October, 60 years after she began her ground-breaking research of chimpanzees in Tanzania. “Hope is a renewable resource,” observed Ms. Sorkin. “For one thing, I imagine Jane will make the connection between how mothers caretake and how Mother Nature needs us to do that now.”

On the occasion of the 2017 International Women's Day, the U.N. secretary-general was quoted as saying, “Despite some improvements, leadership positions across the board are still held by men. We must change this, by empowering women at all levels, enabling their voices to be heard and giving them control over the future of our world.”

Ms. Sorkin sees the U.N. secretary-general as “a huge champion of gender equality. We’ve all seen women in power with their collaborative leadership style outperform. Countries led by women managed the COVID crisis better than their male counterparts,” she maintained. The U.N., she added, is one of a growing group talking about climate and gender equality as something that “solves human problems, that makes everyone’s life healthier. “Remember,” she pointed out, “it was Guterres who gave Greta Thunberg a platform at the U.N. to tell it like it is to the world.”

While Ms. Sorkin’s upbringing was rooted in St Louis, Missouri, she said she is eternally grateful her family opted for international travel rather than summer camps. “Going to Hawaii as a child was a turning point, not just because of the beauty, but the multicultural aspect,” she recalled. She spent her sophomore year in college in Japan, at the height of the Vietnam War. “This was truly a formative experience where I was able to look at the U.S. and the world from a variety of perspectives.”

She earned a master’s degree at the Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University, which she called “an incubator for committed global citizens.” It left an indelible mark, she believes, on her understanding of the international dimensions of environmentalism.

And yet, increasingly, Ms. Sorkin has come to believe in the importance of local activism. A Pound Ridge resident for seven years, she is married to Martin Rosen, an attorney. She said the town is “consistent with our deep love of nature. There are more trees per acre in Pound Ridge than any town in the U.S., and they have so much to teach us about family, connection, community,” she said.

Ms. Sorkin has two stepsons, and the youngest works in environmental management in Northern California. “I can’t take credit for his career but was so happy he was able to help me with events for the U.N. Environment Program” Indeed, one small step does lead to the next one.

“It’s helpful to remember,” she said, “if we give Mother Nature a chance, she is resilient. We have a great responsibility to ‘get it right’ or it is us who will be on the endangered species list.”

Joining the leaders of the pack at next Tuesday's watch party offers one way Bedford can start to get it right, heeding the call of the wild.

The U.N. International Women's Day Watch Party will be held Tuesday, March 9 at the Bedford Playhouse, located at 633 Old Post Road, Bedford. The program will run from 9 to 11:45 a.m., with an optional lunch. All donations received will be directed to U.N. Women.

For registration and more information, visit womenswolfpack.org.

Joyce Corrigan

Joyce Corrigan, a features contributor, has held senior positions in magazine publishing including co-editor at ELLE, New York correspondent for Conde Nast Traveller, deputy editor at the Sunday Times Magazine UK and editor-at-large at Marie Claire.