

GFWC CT Fall Conference
Sat., September 20, 2025
Fairview Farm Golf Course, Harwinton

Call To Order. The 2025 General Federation of Women's Clubs Fall Conference was opened by President Kathy Barnes at 10:00 am. All attendees and guests, Tina Smith, New England Region President, and Michael Criss, First Selectman from Harwinton, were welcomed.

Inspiration. Sally Johnson, State Aide to the President, Harwinton WC, delivered today's inspiration, reminding us to "cherish this sisterhood, for when women support women, amazing things happen."

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America. Led by Pat Green, Harwinton WC.

Collect for Club Women. Led by Pam Lazaroski, Co-President, Harwinton WC.

Guest Introduction. Maddy Marzullo, Harwinton Women's Club Co-President and State Veterans Chair, came forward to introduce Harwinton's First Selectman Michael Criss, who presented President Kathy Barnes with an official citation to the General Federation of Women's Clubs of Connecticut declaring the Town of Harwinton's appreciation to the Harwinton Woman's Club and all GFWC CT clubs for the volunteer work they are doing to better life in their communities.

Credentials. Joanne Sullivan, State Meetings Chairman, GFWC Windsor Woman's Club, announced a preliminary credential report: Presidents and Co-Presidents, 14. Past State Presidents, 5. District Officers, 2. GFWC CT Officers, 9. The club with the most attendance, Harwinton, 7; District with the most attendance, North Central, 19, Guests, 1. TOTAL ATTENDANCE: 40.

The Chairman declared a quorum for today's meeting.

Introductions. The President made the following introductions.

Head Table: Mischa Campbell, **Member At Large**, North Haven WC; Michelle Eifes, **Corresponding Secretary**, Harwinton WC; Pam Lerner, **GFWC CT Assist. Treasurer/Club President**, North Haven WC; Jeanne Kehoe, **GFWC CT Treasurer**, East Hartford WC; Joann Hohensee, **Recording Secretary**, Harwinton WC; Nicole Karalli, **2nd Vice President**, Harwinton WC; Wendy Clery, **President Elect**, WC Danbury/New Fairfield; and Sara Newell, **3rd Vice President**, WC Danbury/New Fairfield and Milford WC.

Past State Presidents: Rita Hartley, 1994-1996; Jeanne Waseleski, 2006-2008; JoAnn Calnen, 2010-2012; Debbie Fiore, 2020-2022; Kathy DeBurra, 2022-2024. Their leadership continues to guide this Federation.

Guest Speaker. President Kathy Barnes gave a warm welcome to Tina Smith, President of GFWC New England Region. Tina will speak later this morning about St. Jude Research Hospital.

GFWC CT Officers' Reports.

Corresponding Secretary, Michelle Eifes, Harwinton WC. The President welcomes Michelle as she steps into her new role as Corresponding Secretary for the remainder of this Administration.

Member At Large, Mischa Campbell reported it has been a quiet year so far. She would love to drive out to your clubs. She is on the road frequently and would like to talk to your members, not to hunt down problems but to share issues. Don't hesitate to call her at 203-430-6530.

Recording Secretary, Joann Hohensee, reported that the minutes for the July 12th Orientation and Board Meeting held in Danbury, have been read, approved and posted on the GFWC CT website. Minutes for an Executive Committee meeting held on Sept. 4th were read, approved and sent to the EC members. She asked for three volunteers to read today's minutes. They were Nicole Karalli, Jeanne Kehoe, and Madeline Marzullo.

Assistant Treasurer, Pam Lerner thanked all the clubs who sent in their rosters in Excel as requested. and has received all club rosters. The State dues invoices were sent to clubs in August and some have paid and some are delinquent. She will be in touch with them.

Treasurer, Jeanne Kehoe reported that all our accounts are up to date, and all invoices have been paid or in process. Expenses are within budget. Since our July meeting, \$8,500 in scholarships have been paid, as well as our General Liability and D&O Insurance policies.

3rd Vice President, Sara Newell recognized the Club Presidents in attendance today: Co-Presidents **Bethel Woman's Club**, Kathy Aiello and Madelaine Gross; **Woman's Club of Enfield Club** President, Sue Michaud; **Hamden Woman's Club**, Linda Melillo; Co-Presidents **Harwinton Woman's Club**, Pam Lazaroski and Maddy Marzullo; Club President **Milford Woman's Club**, Dottie Brower; Club President **Mystic Women's Club**, Christine Kuzma; **The Newington/Wethersfield Women's Club** President, Chylene Penders; Co-Presidents **Suburban Woman's Club of Greater New Britain**, Deb Duval and M J McCarthy; **Windsor Woman's Club** President Geri Harvey.

District Presidents also in attendance: Lynn Sarro, **SE District** President, and Karen Allies, **NC Assistant District** President. Our District Days this Club year will be

North Central District, Sat., March 28th

Southeast District, Sat., April 11th

Southwest District, Tuesday, April 14th

Northwest District, Sat., April 25th

It is always a great day to spend with fellow club members! Each District President and Assistant is already busy making preparations, please say yes if you are asked to help. The Membership Task Force for GFWC continues to meet via Zoom and share ideas across this great country. Though different, we are all surprisingly the same!

2nd Vice President, Nicole Karalli reported that the first of her Reporting Workshops took place on Sept. 8th and one person attended, which was okay. As long as one person is interested, she will conduct the workshop. This worked out well because Nicole was able to work at the attendee's pace and degree of knowledge. The attendee liked the workshop so much she said that she planned to attend two more.

The next workshop will be Monday evening, Sept. 22nd. If you are interested in this or any of the workshops, just send her an email and she will send you the zoom link. **HOBV.** At the last Executive Board meeting, at the bequest of President Kathy, Nicole volunteered to contact HOBV headquarters to find out what the cost of sponsorship is and how GFWC CT can get involved. She reported back at Fall Conference that the price of attendance to a state conference in Conn. is \$400 but the school normally picks up the cost. She was given the name and email address for the Points of Contact in Connecticut. She emailed them asking: 1) if we could sponsor a young lady, and 2) could we sponsor a program or part of a program, providing of course that we get our name up on the marquis stating that we did so. She is waiting to hear back from them.

President Elect, Wendy Clery opened her report with a “Thank You” to all Club presidents and co-presidents in attendance for all they do for their clubs, and that they are appreciated. She updated us on the **Archive Digitization Project** and that it is still on hold. The CT State Library told her they expected to be ready to start again in the fall, but they are not at this time. She assured us that she will keep checking on when we can get back to the job there. **LEADS.** Wendy will be holding a CT LEADS workshop on Saturday, Nov. 15th. She will be using some material from the book “The Let Them Theory” by Mel Robbins, with the author’s permission. If you can get a chance to read it prior to the workshop, that’s great but it’s not a requirement. More details for the day will be sent out to Club presidents. Please share with all members as all are welcome. Finally, we have ideas in the works for statewide awareness campaigns for GFWC CT. She asked us to start thinking about that, including places in your town that you would share with visitors and how they are connected to your club. Other ideas are welcome too, of course. Lastly, don’t’ forget about our **Leadership Library!**

President’s Report. GFWC CT President Kathy Barnes reported on representing GFWC CT at the GFWC Board of Directors meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah. While on a tour of the Utah State Capitol, she learned that women could vote in Utah, until state leaders realized that not all states allowed women that right, so it was rescinded. At the conference there was considerable discussion of reporting and contests and the use of AI in them. All writing and poetry contest submissions will be reviewed for the use of AI, which in that case is considered plagiarism. If you are using AI to help put together materials for communications and public relations, fine. Another topic which was brought to the Presidents group was reporting of fundraising. Dues money is not fundraising, additional donations from members at the time they pay dues may be considered fundraising, and income earned from accounts which are not restricted is fundraising. You will see a change in the statistical form which makes reporting fundraising much clearer. There was also a lot of emphasis on finishing our administration by working hard to accomplish what we had for goals 15 months ago.

In GFWC Connecticut, there are a few clubs who have not yet submitted their dues checks, but all clubs have submitted their rosters. The tree full of owls in the front of the room represents CT clubs. The bottom of the tree are owls representing the 16 CT clubs which have had a decrease in membership. The 6 owls in the middle are clubs who have stayed the same, and the 5 at the top are the clubs who have grown. There is room at the top for many more! She urged us to really work between now and the

end of this calendar year to not only get back to where we were last year, but go higher and stronger. Please reach out to those members who have not renewed and invite them back.

Looking for some different CSP projects? Information on these three projects is available on the front table:

- 1) During the next four months, we will be hearing about the Learning Gateway series. On October 14th, in time for Child Advocacy Week, GFWC will host a webinar with David Coffey and Graeme Page from the Safe Surfin' Foundation which will highlight resources to equip children with the tools they need to stay safe on the web. Have a watch party and you've just completed an **Advocates for Children project!**
- 2) For an autumn **Environment CSP project**, maybe consider this. Do you know that if you turn out unnecessary outdoor lights between now and November 15th you are helping reduce the risk of light pollution for migrating birds and insects like Monarch butterflies and dragonflies? Our state is a migration corridor. Get a poster out and let your community know about this. This could have a huge impact.
- 3) For an **Arts and Culture project**. How many clubs don't recognize what they do that fits in this category? How about a group trip to the Bushnell to see "SUFFS"? A few of us already have tickets. There is also a Bushnell Children's Theater, which has a show in March – "We Can Do It – A Celebration of Women's History." Just in time for Women's History Month! Help a student group get there.

Finally, is anyone interested in a road trip to the GFWC Headquarters in D.C. for the December 10th open house? Last year was Kathy's first year attending the open house, all decorated out in its beautiful finery. She reported that what she liked most of all was when she walked in the door and gave them her name, they said "Welcome home." Not "welcome to our headquarters", "not welcome to our office," but "welcome home." And she truly felt that way all through the building.

Our next meeting is the Board of Directors meeting on February 7, 2026 which will be held in Madison. Hoping to see you all there for an informative and fun program.

Guest Speaker. President Kathy Barnes introduced our guest speaker, Tina Smith, 2024-2026 President of GFWC New England Region. Tina is chairman of the GFWC New Hampshire Signature Program: Domestic Violence & Sexual Awareness Prevention; GFWC New Hampshire State President and member of the GFWC Signature Program and Leadership Committees; the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence Development Committee and Survivor's Caucus, and was appointed 2026-2028 GFWC Signature Program Domestic and Violence & Sexual Awareness Prevention chairman. Tina will share information on St. Jude Research Hospital, an affiliate of GFWC, and how she has helped rally New England clubs to join together to support St. Jude. First FYI of the day! It is called **St. Jude** Children's Research Hospital, or St. Jude for short. It is **not** *St. Jude's*. As New England Region President, her motto is "Be Bold! Use Your Voice!" So, Tina set her goal to raise \$10,000 during her administration asking every club in the six New England states, to donate at least \$200 in the next two years to St. Jude. Well, she has raised \$11,450 in her first year, and is raising her goal to \$20,000 for her second year. St. Jude was founded in 1962 by Danny Thomas. Finding cures and saving the lives of children with cancer and other life-threatening diseases is their mission. To help families cope, all treatment, travel, housing, and food are paid for the patient and family while their child is under treatment at St. Jude. It costs two

billion dollars to sustain St. Jude each year. 89% of those funds are raised (donated) every year. St. Jude partners with 400 institutions. They share their medical research with the world. They help children in all fifty states and around the world in low- and middle-income countries. St. Jude is doing research in blood, genetic and many other childhood disorders. Something new for their patients is a school program called “St. Jude Imagine Academy”. This is sponsored by *Chili’s* and they will work with the child’s local school to help keep them up-to-date with their studies.

Tina’s talk concluded with a special presentation of donation checks to St. Jude from Kathy Barnes on behalf of **GFWC CT**, and the **Northeastern CT Woman’s Club**; and Jeanne Kehoe on behalf of the **East Hartford Woman’s Club**. Additionally, the President acknowledged donations to St. Jude from **Harwinton Woman’s Club** and **Suburban Woman’s Club of Greater New Britain** which were made earlier in the year. In appreciation for an inspiring talk, Kathy also presented Tina with a “Taste of Connecticut” gift to bring back home. Tina thanked her and said it is her pleasure to engage, motivate, and celebrate GFWC members.

On a final note, Tina updated us on the NER Conference to be held October 31st – November 2nd at Mills Falls on the Lake in Meredith, NH. This year’s theme is “This Is How We Roll.” Deadline for registration is October 12th.

Nominating Committee Report. Kathy DeBurra, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, recognized all members of the Committee in attendance. They were: Kathleen Aiello, Debbie Fiore, JoAnn Sullivan, and Jeanne Waseleski. Alternates on the committee are Madelaine Gross and Lynne Sarro. Kathy continued, *[inserted text]* “These Committee Members are anxiously awaiting to speak to you about your future Leadership positions, GFWC/CT Members! As we know that President Clery will bring another amazing 2 years to GFWC/CT! We have a few interested candidates, but please reach out to us with your input and dedication AND AN APPLICATION! I personally can say that none of the jobs are difficult! All of them are interesting, fun and fulfilling. We have six positions to fill. We have some credible interest in some of the positions, but we truly want to have anyone who is interested considered. Thank you very much for your investment in GFWC/CT – the Legacy you contribute to all you do, and please consider LEADERSHIP as part of that legacy!”

The President asked Kathy D. to also talk about the Memphis trip, which will take place March 6-9, 2026. Kathy D. is coordinating it and cost includes round trip airfare from Logan Int’l Airport, lots of food, a tour of St. Jude (research section only), Elvis, and more. Please let Kathy D. know if you’re interested!

Veterans. Maddy Marzullo, Harwinton WC and GFWC CT Veterans Chairman, came forward to report on support and recognition initiatives for Veterans.

- The bags on the tables are for our yearly donation to **Wreaths Across America**. Wreaths will be laid at cemeteries this year on Saturday, December 13th for veterans that have passed. We salute them. REMEMBER * HONOR * TEACH The bags will be collected during our break and reported back to you with the donated amount. Maddy will give that amount to our treasurer with a note to go with the donation to a cemetery. If you know of a cemetery

participating in Wreaths Across America and you would like GFWC CT to make a donation, please let Maddy know.

- **Honor Flight Connecticut.** Honor Flight Connecticut is next Saturday, Sept. 27th at Bradley International Airport at the Southwest Airlines lower level. The Honor Flight Connecticut mission is to honor our Veterans by transporting them to Washington, D.C. to visit and reflect at their memorials. Suggested arrival time for club members: 7 am (parking is tight). If you would like, bring posters, signs, flags to wave, to show your appreciation while thanking the Veterans for their Service. Bring your outdoor voices welcoming the Veterans, and your Smiles (especially good for your heart!).
- **Veterans Day – November 11th.** Veterans Day refers to the November 11, 1918 Armistice, or peace agreement, at the “eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month” that officially ended World War One’s hostilities. Veterans Day’s purpose is to honor and thank *all* individuals, everybody who has served in the United States Armed Forces, recognizing their patriotism, dedication, and the sacrifices they and their families have made to protect our Nation’s freedoms, rather than just remembering those who died. Please attend your area ceremony if you are able. All this information is in the Presidents mail boxes for you to share with your club sisters.

Let's give thanks to our own!

*JoAnn Calnan, Enfield
Laurie Dunlop – Manchester
Donna Farrell – Madison
Nicole Karalli – Harwinton*



2026 LEADS Kick Off. Lynne Sarro, Woman’s Club of Madison, Southeast District President, and GFWC CT 2025 LEADS graduate, came forward to talk about her LEADS experience. Members welcomed Lynne with a loud, robust “yoo-hoo!” [*Inserted text*] “I was honored to be chosen as the 2025 LEADS, Leadership and Development Seminar Candidate. I joined the Women’s Club of Madison 7 years ago and went from Hospitality Chair to VP to President to VP and SE District President. The LEADS seminar was so helpful, I thought, this would have great if I did this FIRST!! There were 42 LEADS candidates at the 2025 Annual Convention in Atlanta. (41 from US and 1 from Aruba!) The training by the Leadership committee covered a very inclusive list of All Things GFWC, ranging from the History of GFWC to Conflict Resolution. There was a full day of sessions designed to cover all these topics through Team Building skits, door prizes, problem solving, more door prizes! I believe this is a very worthwhile program whether you are planning to stay an active club member, move up in your local or State organization or become International President, or just being more organized at home or work, this is definitely a great opportunity. Thank you!”

In addition, Lynne spoke about the upcoming 125th anniversary of the Woman’s Club of Madison in October.

President Kathy Barnes spoke briefly about her LEADS experience saying how amazed she was at the things she learned at LEADS. She frequently refers back to the materials she received to help her go forward with her decision making. Kathy urged us to find those women in our clubs who you see as

leaders for your club, as possible leaders for our state. Point them to the GFWC CT website and the LEADS application and encourage everyone interested to apply. President Elect Wendy Clery will be holding a LEADS seminar on Saturday, Nov. 15th. Watch for details to follow.

International Day of Service. September 27, 2025 is the International Day of Service. The President reported that the following CT clubs are registered: Bethel, East Hartford, Enfield, Ellington, Killingworth, Madison, Manchester, Mystic, Northeastern, Newington/Wethersfield, Newtown, North Haven, Somers, Suburban of Greater New Britain, and Windsor. She urged all clubs not registered to get involved. Your event may not be on Sept. 27th, but that should not stop you from doing something for IDS. Get it reported to Kathy and get credit for your club. Kathy spoke on the two clubs she belongs to and what they're doing. Manchester WC is holding a tag sale and monies raised will be used to buy gift cards for Interval House. During the tag sale a representative from Interval House will be there with information about its work in schools on teen dating violence. Northeastern WC (the giant club of 4), with permission from Food Share, is handing out municipal contact information during their Food Share distribution for survivors or victims of domestic violence who need help.

In our red folder is information listing the 18 facilities in the Conn. Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV). Find the one in your area and give them a call and speak about the Success for Survivors scholarships. (A phone call is more effective than a letter.) Please get these applications into the hands of those who could really use them. Information on the scholarship may be found at the GFWC website.

The President reported that GFWC/CT is also registered for the International Day of Service and that the Executive Committee approved a donation of \$1,000 to the GFWC Success for Survivors Scholarships. On behalf of the Executive Committee, the President moved that we donate \$1,000 to the Success for Survivors Scholarship. This motion and vote were later found to be invalid. Correction: 2nd Vice President Nicole Karalli came forward and made the following motion: "The Executive Committee wishes to donate \$1,000 to the GFWC Success for Survivors Scholarships. I move that we accept that motion." That motion comes out of committee; it does not need a second. No further discussion. All in favor. Motion carries and is approved.

As we prepared to take our lunch recess, the President invited clubs to come forward to briefly talk about what they are doing for their IDS project.

We then recessed for networking, fundraising and social time.

Expression of Thanks. Michelle Eifes, Harwinton WC, gave the Expression of Thanks, asking us to "...take time to pause from the busyness of life and enjoy this time together as a community of strong, empowering women..."

Buffet luncheon.

Meeting resumes.

Strategic Plan for GFWC CT. The President provided some background about the Strategic Plan. It has been brought to the Executive Committee to endorse. All conference attendees had been emailed a copy

of the plan to review prior to the conference. The Strategic Plan focuses on four areas critical to the long-term success of our organization: Fiscal Health and Stability; Membership Development; Communication, Branding and Public Awareness; and Leadership. The President asked Wendy Clery, Leadership Chairman and President Elect, for a motion that read, "On behalf of the Executive Committee, I move we adopt the GFWC CT Strategic Plan as given to attendees and posted at this meeting." The President added that this motion comes out of committee and therefore needs no second. The President explained that the strategic plan refers to a strategic planning committee which is not listed in our Bylaws or Standing Rules, but there is allowance for appointment of a special committee. *[Article 10, Section B inserted here]: "Special Committees are those appointed for specific purposes designated by the President. The Chairman of such a committee may serve on the Board of Directors at the discretion of the President. Upon the President's recommendation, a Special Committee may be established as a permanent committee."* A notice will be sent to Club presidents for distribution to members seeking anyone interested in serving on this committee if this plan is adopted. The President called for a vote. All in favor, none opposed. Motion carries. The President declares we will have a Strategic Planning Committee by the next Board of Directors meeting, which will be on February 7, 2026.

Workshops – Tools to Help Your Club Thrive. The President felt that because the mini-workshops were such a success at our July meeting, she would offer something similar at Fall Conference. Members had a choice of four 15-minute workshops to choose from.

- **Community Impact Program**, led by GFWC CT President Elect Wendy Clery. This workshop focused on your current projects and some suggestions for more to enhance your club's impact.
- **Chairman-ing**: facilitated by Nicole Karalli, GFWC CT 2nd VP. Hear how State Chairs approach the job. Tools For Club Chairman to use. How you can help recruit chairmen for your Club.
- **Membership**: facilitated by Sara Newell GFWC CT 3rd VP. It all starts with members. Sharing information from the GFWC Membership Task Force.
- **Recording Secretary Tools and Tips**: facilitated by Joann Hohensee, GFWC CT Recording Secretary and Sue Michaud President, The Woman's Club of Enfield. Recording secretaries help author the story of GFWC. Some extra help to help Clubs recruit to fill the position.

Following the discussions, a facilitator from each workshop came up to the podium to talk about their workshop.

Fundraising. Maddy Marzullo reported that \$226 in donations was received in the Wreaths Across America red bags. She asked the President if GFWC CT would up the donation to \$300 by contributing \$74. Joanne Sullivan made a motion that "GFWC CT up the donation to Wreaths Across America to the amount of \$300.00 with a \$74 donation, including the money raised on the table." Seconded by Kathy Aiello. No further discussion. President called for a vote, all in favor, none opposed. Motion carries and the Treasurer will cut a check.

Items for the GFWC CT raffle included two beautiful potted chrysanthemum plants, and a winter-themed Vera Bradley handbag set, all donated by East Hartford WC. Amount raised for GFWC CT was \$190.00.

The 50/50 raffle raised \$290 with \$145 going to GFWC CT and \$145 going to the lucky winner! The Hamden WC was selling tickets for its "Basket of Usables" to support the LOVE146 Project, and Harwinton WC was selling tickets for their "From Sea to Shining Sea" quilt raffle to be held in November, funds raised for local scholarships.

Before closing, a few clubs came forward to briefly talk about their fundraising projects.

The President adjourned the meeting at 2:01 pm.

Joann Hohensee,
Recording Secretary
2024-2026 Administration

