

WANDer woman

Area peace activist to lead national group

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BY HELEN NIEMIEC
STAFF WRITER

Arlene Victor is passionate about peace and empowering women, putting the two causes together in a group called WAND, Women's Action for New Directions.

The Bloomfield Township woman founded the Oakland County chapter of WAND in 1986, and has been a visible and vocal force. Not only does she organize activities within her group, speak to other groups, and participate in demonstrations, Victor also is very active in the national organization.

This fall she becomes the national president of WAND, making that her full-time job.

"The president takes on more responsibility," Victor said. "But the mission is deeply important to creating a better future."

The presidency, Victor said, is a position that she never dreamed of having.

"It's not something I'm drawn to naturally. I love playing the piano and I love the arts. And I thoroughly enjoy working with other women — I can't begin to tell you how dedicated these people are and how brilliant they are," Victor said.

She doesn't talk much about herself or her role as president, opting instead to concen-



STEPHEN CANTRELL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

At the helm: Arlene Victor's office in her Bloomfield Township home is a fortress of WAND material, including a fax machine that keeps her in contact not only with the national headquarters but also groups throughout the state.

trate on the message of her group.

She's committed WAND's mission statement to memory and said it succinctly sums up the goals of its members:

"Our goal is to empower women to act politically to decrease militarism and violence and to redirect military resources to human and environmental needs."

A key WAND effort is to make the federal defense budget a women's issue.

"Every dollar spent for the military is a dollar taken away from domestic issues," said Victor. "That's not to say that I'm against having a strong defense system. Security is having an adequate defense, but what we've got is much more than that."

WAND isn't all that happy with President Bill Clinton's plan to cut the military budget, explaining that the net result will be a 4-percent budget decrease — hardly a drop in the bucket. The federal government also needs to come up with a conversion plan to turn military jobs into private sector jobs, as happened after World War II, Victor said.

In addition to letter writing campaigns and other means to further awareness, WAND set up a Women's Legislative Lobby, in which state representatives and senators are invited to participate and work together toward common goals.

Local elected officials who participate include state Reps. Maxine Berman of Southfield, Barbara Dobb of West Bloomfield and Jan Dolan of Farmington Hills. Dolan serves as co-chairwoman of the lobby.

Dolan said the effort at the state level sends a message to fed-

eral representatives in Washington, D.C. on what is important at the local levels. The issues in which WLL is primarily involved include health care, women's and children's issues, the environment, and jobs in a peacetime economy.

"By joining with other legislators across the country, we have a greater impact," Dolan said.

With the increase in women getting elected and achieving more powerful positions in the private sector, Dolan said, the national agenda gradually will change to one that includes what have been called traditionally women's issues.

"A lot of the agenda we have is a family agenda. That's not to say that the issues don't concern men. Maybe women are more able to articulate those needs because of experiences and socialization," Dolan said.

It's been a long road for Victor, who got active because her daughter was involved with the issue of nuclear disarmament. At that time, the last half of WAND's name stood for "nuclear disarmament," changed to "new directions" in recent years to better reflect the global political climate.



FILE PHOTO

Getting active: Arlene Victor wasn't shy about her opposition to the Star Wars defense plan and the governmental efforts to increase its nuclear capabilities. In 1988, she and others staged a protest in Clinton Township.

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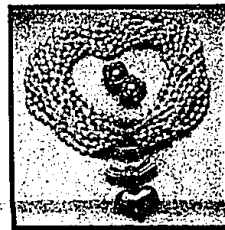
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