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THE PROMISE OF A NEW DAY

Non-hunters alliance seeking rights.

Over a year ago this column discussed the subject of self-protection of non-hunting citizens, whose lands are annually invaded by trespassing hunters. Two years before that, Karen Wood, a young mother of twins, was shot to death in her own yard in Maine. Her land was wooded, and a hunter mistook her for a deer. Ultimately, the hunter was exonerated, and Ms. Wood was blamed (posthumously) for daring to go outside her house without wearing orange.

This tragedy received nationwide publicity. It has sparked something new—an organization to support the rights of non-hunters. The Non-hunters' Rights Alliance (NhRA) states: "There is movement on many fronts in an effort to make the woods, and private property, safe and private once again. And from all across the nation, the word is spreading fast that the days may soon be over when peace-loving citizens must endure the presence of armed intruders on their property or be berated for failing to accommodate hunters in the fall ritual of killing wildlife."

A nationwide debate is forming on the fundamental question of why a homeowner who does not wish to have his or her land hunted should be required to take difficult, expensive steps to post property, steps that trespass laws frequently render ineffective anyway. Why, asks the NhRA, shouldn't landowners be entitled to a presumption that they wish to be left in peace on their own land?

Response to the idea of non-hunters' rights has been tremendous. Hundreds of people from all across the country have contacted NhRA, asking for information. Many have told heartbreaking stories of trespass, animal butchery

and other abuses at the hands of hunters. These people are desperate for a solution to their problems, and, until they heard about NhRA, felt they had nowhere to turn.

In mid-November the NhRA held a conference in southern Maine, to bring together citizens and featured speakers. They encouraged supporters in other regions to organize similar events and promised to supply draft letters that can be sent to public policy makers and to the media.

A recent release by NhRA declares: "Hunting is a sport that brings danger to the doorstep of non-hunters who must cope with an invasion of armed 'sportsmen' in our woods and fields each year. Not only are we forced to hear the constant ringing of gunfire around us, but we are lectured to by hunters about our obligation to clearly post our property against trespassers if we want to be left alone, and we are told that it is our responsibility to wear bright orange clothing if we wish to be safe while spending time outdoors. The time has come for change. Hunting has enjoyed priv-

ileges out of proportion with any other recreational activity, at the expense and at the risk of non-participants who simply want to live in peace, free from fear of danger. No longer will we allow ourselves to be driven indoors each fall.

"Although this action will raise fundamental questions about constitutional rights and deep-seated traditions, such action is already overdue, and must be vigorously pursued."

Says Dan Namowitz, the individual who started the whole thing rolling, "It never ceases to amaze me what people have been made to endure."

The tragic death of Karen Wood has not been in vain. It is in her memory that the NhRA will carry on its aggressive campaign to stand up for non-hunters' rights. Its motto is: "Take back the woods!" and the organization has vowed to keep at it until the woods are safe for people as well as the wildlife.

For more information, contact NhRA, PO Box 8182, Bangor, Maine 04402, 207-236-6328.