

# ABOUT TOWN

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(Photo by Valerie Krejcie)

Kirk Allen and John Kraft, known as the Edgar County Watchdogs, are frequently asked to speak about their work at various events across the state. Friday, the pair traveled to Naperville to speak at the League of Women Voters Annual Convention.

## From watchdogs to public speakers

### Edgar County Watchdogs make a name for themselves statewide

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Love them or hate them, no one can deny that Kirk Allen and John Kraft are shaking things up statewide.

Known locally as the Edgar County Watchdogs, the pair run a website called Illinois Leaks with the hopes of stopping government corruption.

They are most well known across the state for their work uncovering corruption at the College of DuPage and even received public "thank you" from State Rep Jeanne Ives during a press conference.

The Edgar County Watchdogs formed in 2010 after Allen and Kraft began talking about their grievances with the local government.

The name was later changed to Illinois Leaks when whistle-blowers from outside the county began asking for help.

"The calls are coming in from all across the state for help," Allen said.

"Now we get more than 90,000 hits on our website each month," added Kraft. "Last month, we got 110,000. That's a lot of readers all over the state."

In addition to posting articles to their website, Allen and Kraft are invited to be guest speakers at various events throughout Illinois.

Just last Friday, the men traveled to Naperville to speak at the League of Women Voters Annual Convention.

They have also spoke at a Tea Party Convention and are scheduled to speak at the annual Libertarian conven-

tion in August.

They joined Shawn Healy, a Civic Learning Scholar from the McCormick Foundation and Ben Joravsky, journalist from the Chicago Reader and author of five books, for a panel discussion on why citizens do not vote.

"The issue is people are losing faith in their local government," Kraft explained.

He noted that many citizens don't think their votes will count.

"Well, it does," he said. "It counts at every level, but mostly at the local level."

Kraft and Allen spoke about corruption in government and back door politics. They encouraged citizens to get involved.

"Just go to a public meeting and sit there and listen. Sometimes that's all it takes," Kraft said. "And vote! If you don't vote, you can't complain about the government."

While often asked to attend meetings in other areas, the watchdogs are not always so well received in their own

community.

"Most of them don't understand what we really do," said Allen.

He noted that people often listen to the "coffee shop talk."

"We just want good, honest government, and we're not going to back off until we get it," Allen said.

People often confuse Illinois Leaks with the publication, "Disclosure."

While Allen said the "Disclosure" has been known to pick up stories they have covered, they have no financial interest in the publication.

People often ask Allen and Kraft who is paying them to attend these public meetings.

"Well nobody," Kraft said. In fact, Allen and Kraft mostly use their own money to pursue their endeavors.

A not-for-profit organization, The Edgar County Watchdogs do accept donations; however, Kraft said he can count on one hand how many donations they receive

in a year.

For fiscal year 2015, they claimed an income of \$4,768 with assets of \$1,642. This is information easily obtainable at [www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov).

Allen and Kraft ask for transparency in government and, in return, are as transparent as possible with their own not-for-profit, though in true journalistic style, they do not reveal their sources.

According to the watchdogs, they do not write any story they cannot back up with documented proof. In fact, most of the stories posted to their website include attached PDF files of any supporting evidence.

Also, if they point out a law that is not being followed by a government entity, and the problem is fixed, they will not print the story, as they have found in many cases that it is lack of knowledge and not corruption that caused the problem.

Some government groups

are even thankful to the watchdogs for helping to fix the problem.

The Redman Town Board is one example.

"The current Redman Town Board should be commended," Allen said, noting that they told the watchdogs, "If we're doing something wrong, tell us and we'll fix it."

"We want them to follow the law. If you don't agree with the law, help change it," Allen added.

Much of what the watchdogs have accomplished includes helping to change laws.

"We've had Bills introduced to fix laws statewide that we uncovered at the College of DuPage," said Kraft.

The Edgar County Watchdogs/Illinois Leaks website can be found at [edgarcounty-watchdogs.com](http://edgarcounty-watchdogs.com).

The website includes a link for donations.

A tipline is also available by calling (312) 566-8078.