By STEPHEN HUGHES
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NORWICH — Audience members at the Rose Senior Center were transported back to Victorian times Wednesday night as actress Kandie Carle put on a historic presentation by dressing layer by layer in the fashion of the era.

Carle had onlookers in stitches as she blended humor and wit to describe the dress and culture of the 1860s middle class.

The presentation was part of the Society of Founders of Norwich annual meeting. During her presentation Carle started out in her underwear (then called drawers) and continued dressing until she was wearing a hoop skirt, petticoat and earrings.

Carle said she researches the habits and customs of the people she portrays along with the costumes she wears during her performances.

"You find some wonderful things about people of different time periods," Carle said.

Carle has more than 250 volumes in her library detailing Victorian lifestyle. She recreates many of the pieces of clothing that cannot be found in antique stores.

Carle finds some of the items used in the show through pure luck. During a trip to Texas, she discovered a 145-year-old pair of underwear in a box of old curtains.

Carle used modern comparisons to relate to the audience. She said clothing companies in the 1860s tried to sell women on the importance of beauty through clothing much like companies today.

"I like to portray the everyday person of the middle class," Carle said.

Before the performance, the Society of Founders of Norwich gave its Christopher Leffingwell Award to author and storyteller Bill Stanley.

"It's presented to someone who has contributed something of a historical nature to the welfare of Norwich," Society Founders President Ann Cannon said.

Stanley has written several books on the Rose City, including ones he just finished called "Once Upon a Time."

"It is very great because of who gave the award," Stanley said. "The Society of Founders are really the backbone of the community."

The Society of Founders was established in 1901 and operates the Christopher Leffingwell House and Museum, a 17th-century house on Washington Street.