

letters

to the Editor

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Valuable team player recognized

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Williamsville East Football Team Manager Tom Drum on a great season.

When game day came, Tom was ready. He was always there with water bottles for the boys; to catch a warm-up ball for the kicker or a congratulatory pat on the shoulder pad after a good play.

I was not able to attend any team practices, but it's my guess that Tom was doing his thing during practice, too.

No, Tom didn't score touch-

downs or make the big tackle, but his role was just as important. That's why Tom gets my vote for Very Valuable Team Member.

Michael Rath
Amherst

Residents grateful for storm response

On the morning of Oct. 14, while all of us at St. Mary's Apartments on Mill Street were suffering the effects of the October Surprise, and our only wish was for a hot cup of coffee and an encouraging word, we were greeted by a friendly gal named

(Please turn to page six)

Big tax breaks look like corporate welfare

As most of us enjoy a bountiful Thanksgiving Day smorgasbord, there are a few political dishes that range from a forkful of dry turkey to warm, homemade apple pie a la mode, that deserve more than just a menu mention.

● ITEM — Let's see, \$68 million or so public dollars to lure Bass Pro as an anchor for Buffalo waterfront redevelopment — a good slice of which will go toward public infrastructure improvements that will benefit far more than just Bass Pro itself — draws the ire of many as some kind of corporate welfare.

But \$79 million in tax breaks, mostly the sales tax kind, to bribe one of the world's largest banks to add 12 jobs, is supposed to be a "feather in our cap," according to Amherst IDA chief Jim Allen.

The problem isn't that major corporations are awarded tax breaks to invest in our region, because it's true that there are a dozen other states that would offer deals as well. It's that for years now, decades in fact, tax breaks are simply being used to save jobs, not create them, as this recent HSBC deal underscores.

In many cases, the billions that have collectively been given away by industrial development agencies haven't spurred growth. At best, it's sustained a status quo that isn't worth sustaining. And as the most recent economic data shows, it isn't even doing a very good job of that. Some 1,700 manufacturing jobs disappeared in Buffalo Niagara in the last year, while only 900 service-sector jobs were created.

Naturally, we'll be lectured about how we don't understand big business, or how IDAs work, and that we should bow down for the taxpayer-funded crumbs onto which we can hold. And spare us the "it's only a sales tax abatement" argument. The incentive comes a week after Comptroller Mark Polancarz sounded the alarm bell that slowing 2006 sales tax collections may mean that 2007 sales tax projections — overly optimistic to begin with — are going to blow a big hole in the Erie County budget.

And when do taxpayers get their abatement? Not soon, seeing as how county lawmakers just extended one of New York's highest sales tax rates for another two years.

● ITEM — Of all the Eliot Spitzer stories that

have tickled the electorate's collective fancy since his election, the best might have come the Monday following his gubernatorial coronation. The governor-elect was holding a series of Albany meetings to begin his transition from one part of the Rockefeller Plaza to another. On the agenda was a parlay with some of the Legislature's top brass, including Alan Hevesi apologist Sheldon Silver.

But Spitzer, maybe not so coincidentally, made sure the pecking order was a little different. While legislators waited their turn, Spitzer first met with a group of what the Albany Times Union labeled "representatives of good government groups." Included was Blair Horner, head of the nonpartisan think tank that famously pronounced New York's government the most dysfunctional in the country.

● ITEM — A smattering of Fox broadcast stations across the county are refusing to show one of the all-time most despicable scheduled broadcasts, showcasing one of the all-time most contemptible human beings, O.J. Simpson, and his deranged view of reality regarding the murders of two human beings. How much more meaningful would it be if the affiliate in the city where he made his fame and fortune would follow that lead? Plenty. But God forbid we subscribe to even a shred of standards and decency in pursuit of the almighty greenback.

WUTV is owned by Sinclair Broadcasting, no stranger, by the way, to making its own call about pre-empting programming with which it doesn't agree. Their ABC stations, you might recall, refused in 2004 to air Tod Koppel's "Nightline" program that recited the names of all the slain servicemen and women in the Iraqi war.

"It is Nightline's failure to present the entire story, however, to which Sinclair objects," wrote CEO David Smith in a letter to John McCain, who was disappointed in the broadcast outlet's decision to refuse to air that which they deemed rubbish.

One can only assume then that Sinclair considers this abominable effrontery a fair and balanced look at one of the most abhorrent news stories of our time. And we wonder why society's values and morals continue in an unabated death spiral.



BRIAN ACKLEY

Political Columnist

EXCLUSIVE ONLINE Bee Poll @ www.AmherstBee.com

Click to vote on this Bee Poll TODAY!

Should nativity scenes be allowed on Town property?

ONLINE POLL RESULTS VOTE

Log onto www.AmherstBee.com today, to cast your vote for next week's online poll!

Last week's question: Should Main Street in Williamsville be reduced to three lanes?

You said: 24% YES 76% NO

How to reach The Bee

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Town faces numerous challenges after Oct. 12 disaster

Amherst suffered a disaster on Oct. 12, the likes of which has not been seen for 90 years. We geared up to face the challenges. The police chief immediately set up an incident management center at the Amherst police headquarters, where all related town department heads met every morning to plan the day's activities.

The power outage was the main cause of suffering for homeowners and businesses. National Grid and NYSEG employed hundreds of crews to restore power lines.

We can't afford to have a repeat of such a power outage in the future. I will soon organize a planning meeting with the electric companies, citizens, and town officials to come up with alternate solutions, including laying electric cables underground.

The town opened emergency shelters at the Harlem Road Community Center, which was managed by the American Red Cross, and another at the Amherst Senior Center.

Amherst is very flat, and, therefore, the sanitary sewer flow has to be pumped up at 43 lift stations before it reaches the town's water pollution control facility on Tonawanda Creek Road. Several of these lift stations stopped due to the power failure, backing up sewer lines in homes.

This became a serious problem. We utilized generators to pump at major locations and set up a 24-hour hot line to help individual homeowners.

Opening the roads for Halloween was another challenge. Our highway crews and the contractor tried to clear as many roads as much as they

could. Trick-or-treating was held without any incident.

Public assistance for the major disaster was granted on Oct. 24 by the federal government. Assistance has also been granted to individual households.

Under this assistance, homeowners and businesses that have been affected by the disaster are eligible to submit a claim for disaster-related damage, which includes, but is not limited to, economic injury assistance, physical injury assistance, and structural failure within the private property of individual homeowners. The deadline for registration for this assistance is Dec. 23 by calling 1-800-621-FEMA.

Contact your insurance company to have the damage appraised and your claim settled first. You do not have to wait for your insurance company to appraise the damage before registering your claim with FEMA.

You may also visit the following Disaster Recovery Centers located in Buffalo and the Town of Tonawanda:

● The Olmstead Center for the Visually Impaired, 1160 Main St., Buffalo.

● Brighton Golf Club, 70 Brompton Road, Tonawanda.

We have lived through the worst of this disaster, but some tasks still need to be completed, including trimming and cutting of damaged trees. Arborists are helping us in deciding which trees will survive through trimming branches and which trees should be felled.

We hope to complete most of the debris removal by the end of December. Several operations will continue through the winter and into the spring of 2007.



SATISH MOHAN

Amherst Supervisor