

letters

to the Editor



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Village should be tourist destination

The new holiday decorations along Main Street look great. But, why are there gaps, and why aren't the trees lighted anymore?

Years ago, the Williamsville Businessmen's Association

took responsibility for lighting the trees along Main but found it too difficult to continue as the trees grew larger. A similar illusion could be created by lighting only the lower branches, but I think the village government should consider lighting the trees as a public service. The town has cherry pickers that

(Please turn to page six)

Corrections

In the Bee Holiday Gift Guide for a story on R Salon in Williamsville, an improper length for Great Lengths Human Hair Extensions was published. The proper length is 1/4 inch.

In the Bee Holiday Gift Guide, incorrect business hours were given for Mischler's Florist and Greenhouses in Williamsville. The business is not open on Sunday.

EXCLUSIVE

Beepoll

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Should an official's absence from a meeting be explained?

ONLINE POLL RESULTS
VOTE

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

Last week's question:

Do you support the recommendation for closing health care facilities?

You said:

35% YES 35% NO
30% SOME BY NOT ALL
0% UNDECIDED

How to reach The Bee

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Letters to the editor must be typed, double-spaced and are limited to a maximum of 300 words. Names will not be withheld unless the author demonstrates a clear reason for anonymity. No unsigned letters will be printed. You must supply your name, address and telephone number for verification. Authors are limited to one letter every four weeks. Letters are subject to editing.

Our deadline is 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to publication. For engagement and wedding announcements, The Bee offers a form to list names and details. Call for a copy. There is no charge to publish engagements, weddings or anniversaries.

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Spitzer collecting substance points on way to governor's mansion

Like they did with the Beatles at Shea Stadium, voters and the media have an ongoing love fest with Gov.-elect Eliot Spitzer that at the moment appears to have no bounds.

But what exactly is the over-under on just how long his honeymoon will last? The number might be somewhere around three. What's tough to figure, however, is whether that figure might be measured in days, months or years.

At some point, the governor-elect will take a major misstep, making a boo-boo that will draw the wrath of critics and columnists from Marilla to Montauk. But until then, the soon-to-be ex-attorney general is piling up style points just like any run-of-the-mill politicians who rack those up as easily and quickly as Spitzer swelled his campaign war chest over the past couple of years.

But more telling, and much more impressive so far, are the substance points he's collecting as well. While much of the recent positive ink has been about Spitzer's campaign finance reform plans, important although still largely window-dressing kind of attention grabbing (style points), there was a virtually unreported and certainly unheralded announcement last week that we can only hope truly defines Spitzer's tenure, however long it may be, in the governor's mansion.

In naming Patrick Foye to lead the Empire State Development Corporation, the mighty powerful entity which wraps its tentacles around virtually every major economic project or proposal in New York, Spitzer walked the walk.

Under George Pataki, that plum spot has been reserved for the ultimate political crony, Charles Gargano, who not so coincidentally doubled as the governor's chief political fundraiser. How convenient for a man who, while wearing his public office hat could almost single-handedly make or break billion dollar projects, and while wearing his political one, could simultaneously reach out and touch bottomless bank accounts for potential Pataki campaign contributions.

Lest you think the arrangement was some kind of renegade Republican-only blurring of responsibilities, know that Mario Cuomo did the same exact thing while he was in office with a man named Vincent Tese.



BRIAN ACKLEY

Political Columnist

Foye's selection is remarkable in large part because of his unremarkable resume, at least when it comes to politics. One of his first forays into the public spotlight came as president of the Nassau County Taxpayer's Committee, leading the fight against the creation of the Nassau County Legislature. (A county without a legislature? Now there's a good idea.) His modest political contributions have been spread across the board, including \$1,000 to John Faso, the man Spitzer beat in last month's elections, in his close but unsuccessful bid in 2002 to become state comptroller. Newsday reports that he has no political affiliation.

His public service resume includes currently serving as president and chief executive officer of the Nassau County United Way and vice chairman of the Long Island Power Authority.

This spring, he ran and was elected to his local school board. He holds degrees in law, history and philosophy from Fordham University. In a profile in the Port Washington News, in response to a question about using property tax assessments to fund the local share of educational costs and the possibility of changing that formula, Foye wrote, "We have to live and manage in the funding system that exists now. Board members and managers must manage in the world of reality."

Pinch me. While agreeing the issue deserves scrutiny and possible change, his view was securely rooted in the here and now, not some Pollyanna-ish potential or whimsical whitewash which has perpetually painted and plastered over the political privations of an entire generation or two.

Voters have to be among the most eternally optimistic people on earth. We harbor more unfulfilled hope than Chicago Cubs and Buffalo Bills fans combined. Eliot Spitzer is the latest incarnation of an elected leader we think can actually pull us from the abyss. Sooner or later, Spitzer's record player needle is going to scratch across the vinyl, but for now, in the words of the immortal Bellamy Brothers, let your love flow.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers of Western New York. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)

Sound financial practices, community input keys to budget

With the holiday season as the backdrop, this is a busy time of year for all of us. It also marks the time when public school districts across New York State are immersed in the challenge of developing fiscal plans for the upcoming school year.

A goal set by the Williamsville Board of Education last August was to develop a fiscally responsible budget that "reflects the values of the community, sustains and enhances the educational program and is supported by the community."

Our objective is actually twofold: to build a fiscal plan that will keep moving the district forward, directing as many resources as possible to the classroom; and to develop a budget that our community can, and will, support in May.

Continued community input is vital. The Board of Education and I encourage community involvement in the budget development process to assure that the values of this community are reflected in the decisions we make on behalf of our students. I encourage residents to ask questions, attend board meetings and understand the facts as the district's 2007-08 spending plan evolves.

Educating the public about issues that will have an effect on our schools, including the proposed spending plan, is an essential aspect of the district's budget development process. We all know that quality schools help protect the value of our property. Currently, a major area of concern beyond the control of the three school districts in the Town of Amherst is the Town Board's recent decision to discontinue its practice of annual full value property assessment.

This decision to abandon its full assessment model and surrender its share of related state aid

for this process will negatively impact the school property tax levy in the town as well as exemptions received by eligible taxpayers. According to information posted online by the NYS Office of Real Property Services (www.orps.state.ny.us), keeping assessments up-to-date each year is essential for fair tax distribution.

The ORPS indicates that when property is assessed at market value, it is easier for taxpayers to determine the equitability of their assessments. The Amherst, Sweet Home and Williamsville Central School District superintendents are working together to research in more detail the potential impact that the town's action will have on property taxpayers. The school districts plan to communicate again with the supervisor and the Town Board in the hopes of mitigating the negative impact of this decision.

In Williamsville, the district has invested wisely in order to help all children succeed. From a financial perspective, the community can be confident that its investment in our school

system is sound. The recent audit conducted by Lumsden & McCormick, LLP confirmed the sound financial status of our schools, the result of keen fiscal management led by Thomas Maturiski, assistant superintendent for finance and management services, the administrative team, and an elected Board of Education, all of whom take their jobs as stewards of your tax dollars very seriously. The district's strong financial status will prove helpful as the Board of Education and I move forward with the very thoughtful and well-planned budget development process.

During this holiday season, I encourage you to take time to enjoy your family and friends. My best wishes for health and happiness in the New Year.



HOWARD S. SMITH

Williamsville School Superintendent