

letters

to the Editor

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Diocese changes due to attendance

This is in reply to Bishop Kmiec's recent decision to close many Catholic churches and diocesan schools throughout the Diocese of Buffalo.

The bishop claims that shifting populations to the suburbs is responsible for his decision. I

believe the real reason for this tragic situation is the dramatic decline in Mass attendance and priestly vocations since Vatican II over 40 years ago.

All the leading Catholic indicators have sharply dropped since the council. For example, "In 1965 there were 58,000 priests in the United States; in 2002 there were 45,000, of whom 16 percent (Please turn to page six)

Correction

The phone number for enTrust Marketing Corporation is 650-4073. The company was featured in the business section of the April 25 edition of The Amherst Bee.

Information in an advertisement for New York Kitchen and Bath published in the April 18-19 Ideas for Your Home supplement was incorrect. The firm has been in business for 10 years.

EXCLUSIVE

Bee Poll

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Last week's question:

Do you have debris that still needs to be picked up?

You said:

44% YES 56% NO

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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Collins gives GOP confidence it will win county exec's race

I've got Jan. 1 circled on the calendar as the date I tackle my next reclamation project. Now that all the pieces of the upcoming Erie County executive's race have pretty much fallen into place — although who earns the Conservative Party nod is still not an insignificant development — Chris Collins has said the right things and made the right moves, right down to picking blue and gold as his official campaign colors.

For the Republican-endorsed candidate, landing on the 26th floor of the Rath Building next year is far more than just a case of dream and believe.

More than just Collins' business acumen and outsider appeal is the recent political swirl of events, which have strengthened the GOP's chances of landing Erie County's top spot. Make no mistake, Democrats surely wanted Mark Polancarz to be their standard-bearer. His short tenure as county comptroller has been marked by an openness and frankness, in dealing with both other county officials and the county control board itself, which would have played well this fall. By not running now, he has raised his future political hand from three of a kind to at least a full house.

And with Jim Keane, the now-official Democrat choice, we'll get a true test in five months of just how willing area voters are to either embrace the future or wallow in the past. The contrast between the two couldn't possibly be more striking.

Keane will hitch part of his star to the Gorski administration, which, while financially sound (in part because it took more revenue from county taxpayers than it should have, it's worth remembering), was hardly a spectacular eight-year tenure of economic growth and revitalization.

Remember the Horizon's Waterfront Commission? World University Games? Uh-huh. Pretty much sums up much of the administration's track record, which blithely bounced between lethargy, languor and listlessness. Upon closer inspection, Keane's role as deputy supervisor is a shooting star at best.

And while egos will be bruised and grudges will play out, the most damaging aspect of Keane's endorsement will be the million or so dollars

Democrats will burn through two months before they ever get to the general election. Still, don't fret for Len Lenihan and his card-carrying operators. Rest assured they will find a way to keep their well-oiled money-printing press humming along nicely after the primary. Why do you think they're called political machines anyway?

Paul Clark and Bill O'Loughlin are interesting side shows, and Clark's especially deep pockets make him dangerous. But they are also like cold bread, hoping to be rescued out of the day-old bin but certainly not out of the political oven fresh. In addition, Clark's ties, personal and family, to incumbent Joel Giambra isn't just rat poison, it's potential cyanide.

Maybe it's a sign of the times that none of the four, in a recent scientific survey by WGRZ-TV, was a particularly recognized name in the executive's race.

Voters long ago seemingly stopped caring about such trivial matters as important political contests. That a full 33 percent of voters surveyed didn't even know the Keane name might be the political antique's most encouraging polling development.

Should Collins emerge the winner, he'll have to deal with a county legislature that is still mostly stuck in the Keane era. It would be a benefit if one-time candidate County Legislator Lynn Marinelli — not that there was ever any chance she could get elected to the post — indeed gets tucked safely away in a job with Gov. Eliot Spitzer, where she can privately play her political games without further damaging the county.

There have been recent election results that give reason for hope, from Amherst's Satish Mohan to legislators Cindy Locklear and Kathy Konst to Depew Mayor Barbara Alberti and others, that the regional train is still wanting to lurch forward, not to be encumbered with a politically overstuffed caboose. Chris Collins has his date book out. Residents of Erie County: we all await your decision.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers of Western New York. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our Web site at www.wnynewspapers.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)



BRIAN ACKLEY

Political Columnist

STAR program questions answered

The 2007-08 New York State budget provides for STAR property tax rebate checks to be sent to homeowners currently enrolled in the Basic STAR program and seniors enrolled in Enhanced STAR.

Seniors enrolled in the Enhanced STAR program do not need to fill out any additional paperwork to automatically receive rebate checks.

Those enrolled in the Basic STAR program must fill out an application, which will be mailed to you by the State Tax and Finance Department around Aug. 15.

Because the new STAR checks will be higher for middle-class taxpayers making less than \$250,000, the tax department must verify income and match it to the primary residence of the STAR rebate recipient.

I wish there was a better way to just mail the check back to homeowners, but the Albany bureaucracy got in the way and requires the application form.

I've put together some frequently asked questions that my office has been responding to regarding these changes. Please take a minute to familiarize yourself with this process, and don't hesitate to contact me at 634-1895 or at hayesj@assembly.state.ny.us if you have more specific questions.

How do I obtain my rebate?

If you are a senior citizen and Enhanced STAR recipient, you need not apply to receive your middle-class STAR rebate check. (Enhanced STAR recipients already verify their income in order to receive this benefit.) An automatic rebate check will be mailed to

you in September.

If you are a Basic STAR recipient, the Department of Tax and Finance will notify you of the application process through a one-time mailing sometime around Aug. 15 after the 2007 assessment roll is finalized. Qualifying homeowners have until Nov. 30, 2007 to apply for a check.

Am I eligible for the rebate if I am not enrolled in the STAR program?

No, you must be enrolled in the STAR exemption program to receive a rebate check this year.

What will be required on the application?

Homeowners must submit income information from their 2005 tax return.

Is the STAR exemption being phased out and replaced with the property tax rebate?

No, they are two separate things. There is no plan to phase out the STAR exemption. The rebate is additional property tax relief.

When will I receive my rebate?

The Department of Tax and Finance intends to send out the checks on a rolling basis after they receive your completed application.

My bank pays my property tax bill directly from my escrow account. Where will my rebate check be sent?

Rebate checks will be sent to eligible property owners at their home address, not to the bank.

Is my rebate check subject to personal income tax?

Unfortunately, the checks will be subject to federal and state personal income tax if you itemize your tax return.



JAMES P. HAYES

New York State Assembly