

## letters

## to the Editor

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## Harmony Party moves for change

On Tuesday, June 19, the voters of the Village of Williamsville will have a clear choice. It is for dedicated, hard-working committed individuals who will stay for their full terms.

It is time to say no to the chaos started by the Vision Party. In

just four years they caused a turnover in the mayor's position, plus three trustee resignations and one trustee change of party affiliation. This resulted in a series of short-term unelected trustees who were never able to fully learn their jobs before they were gone.

It is time to say yes to consistency and reliability in our village. (Please turn to page six)

## Corrections

Amherst Middle School student Jacob Manny, eighth grade, was named to the high honor roll for the third quarter of the 2006-07 school year. Incorrect information was provided by the school.

Travis Denman is not the only Sweet Home baseball player to throw a no-hitter against an opponent in the last nine years as reported in the May 23 Bee. Andrew Goetz tossed a no-hitter in May 2004 against Hamburg in the Section VI Class AA quarterfinals.

EXCLUSIVE

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Last week's question:

**Does construction change your shopping destinations?**

You said:

**79% YES 21% NO**

## How to reach The Bee

The Amherst Bee publishes community news free of charge. Mail items to The Amherst Bee, P.O. Box 150, Buffalo, NY, 14231-0150. Our telephone number is 632-4700. Our fax number is 633-8601. Our Web sites are www.BeeNews.com and www.AmherstBee.com. Amherst Managing Editor David Sherman's e-mail address is dsherman@BeeNews.com. Amherst Associate Editor Jessica Finch's e-mail address is jfinch@BeeNews.com. Senders should state on their contributions whether their e-mail address can be published.

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's consolidation proposal a noble idea, but it won't work

When it comes to talk concerning consolidation, every few years we hear of a couple of area school districts beginning to talk about some type of merger or incorporation of shared services.

Talks about trying to cease the overlapping of public services in an effort to decrease the devastating impact of the constantly escalating tax burdens we are dealing with here in Western New York always sound refreshing.

But let's make no mistake that when we hear about the talks of consolidation, it's just that — talk.

And, as the old saying goes, talk is cheap, especially when it comes to consolidation of the various taxing jurisdictions and special districts in this area.

Consolidation? Great idea, but it's time to face the fact that the elected officials and appointed administrators of the districts supposedly considering some sort of consolidation are simply wasting their breath.

That's right. As long as the present mindset of protecting our own turf remains one of the most important factors in deciding if any sort of consolidation or shared services should occur, it — meaning consolidation of any form — will never happen.

Gov. Eliot Spitzer recently formed a new commission that has a fancy title and promises to introduce potential ways to save New York taxpayers significant amounts of money, but remaining very skeptical about what kind of impact Spitzer's group will have on our local towns, villages and schools seems to be a pretty safe bet.

Why? Plain and simple, we all like our own turf?

That's right. When it comes to the talk about consolidating school districts, it's quite easy to say it will never happen because of something as simple as baseball.

That's right. You can say our nation's pastime is partly to blame as to why area school districts will never actually take the necessary steps needed to consolidate.

What you have is parents wanting their children to play on the varsity baseball team. By having the number of school districts that exist today, 31 at last count here in Western New York, the student

body sizes are small, meaning more students have a chance to be a varsity athlete and a star on the diamond when having fewer districts might not allow for as many of our children to earn a varsity letter playing baseball or any other sport.

Here are some simple and easy to understand bullet point facts about how burdensome local governments are here in Erie County:

- In addition to the previously mentioned 31 school districts, Erie County has local government representation in 25 towns, 18 villages and three cities.

- For every 1,000 county residents, there is one local governmental body.

- There is a local government per square mile in Erie County. That's right, those 1,010 local governments are operating in 1,044.7 square miles of land.

Despite having these numbers smack us right between the eyes, we don't think Spitzer's Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness will be able to do much in terms of cutting through the 4,200 taxing jurisdictions and 6,900 special districts that exist throughout the state.

When the formation of the new commission was announced, Spitzer was quoted in several publications, saying the many different layers of government "have led to a significant degree of overlap in public services, which has had a devastating effect on tax burdens. Something has to be done."

Yes, something has to be done. But nothing will. As stated before, we like our own turf. Check that, we love our own turf.

We love it so much we are willing to use the first \$4 million or so raised in local school taxes to pay the salaries and benefits of 31 superintendents, whose main focus is to follow the same mandates established by the state and the federal governments 31 times.

Spitzer's proposal is a noble idea. But when it's all said and done, the "something" Spitzer talks about won't amount to much, and the governor will simply be spitting in the wind.

(Daniel Meyer is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers of Western New York. Opinions are those of the author.)

## Full agenda in Albany awaits decision as adjournment looms

With the Legislature set to adjourn on June 21, the Assembly and Senate will be especially busy over the next three weeks, debating a wide variety of proposals on economic and social issues that could have a dramatic impact on taxpayers in Western New York.

To his credit, Gov. Eliot Spitzer has convened a weekly series of leadership meetings, open to the public and widely attended by statewide media, in an attempt to reach a compromise on many of the issues that have fallen victim to legislative gridlock in past years. I had the opportunity to participate in one of these meetings last week, in my capacity as the ranking Republican on the Ways and Means Committee, to help reach consensus on a new \$300 million capital budget for economic development projects that will help private-sector businesses create jobs in Western New York.

Also at the top of the agenda are several criminal justice proposals, including a plan to expand the state's DNA database, authorizing the collection of a DNA sample from every person convicted of a crime. Currently, the state collects a DNA sample only from those convicted of a felony and some misdemeanor crimes. The recent arrest of and guilty plea by the bike path rapist Altemio Sanchez — and the subsequent release of wrongly convicted Anthony Capozzi — clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of DNA evidence in convicting violent criminals while at the same time exonerating those who may have been wrongly accused. There is a strong push to approve legislation that would mandate HIV testing for those formally charged with rape or

sexual assault, a bill very similar to one I have sponsored since my first election to the State Assembly.

There is also a push to reform the state's Wicks Law, enacted in 1912, which mandates public construction projects be separately awarded and is believed to increase construction costs to

municipalities and school districts (local taxpayers) by more than 30 percent. A streamlined process for the construction of new electric and clean-coal power plants to supply more electricity to consumers is also being negotiated.

Government reform issues are being hotly debated, including proposals to reform the way public authorities — such as the New York Power Authority — conduct business in the public interest. Campaign finance reform is also being highlighted, along with other open-government initiatives.

Much attention has also been paid to Spitzer's social agenda that includes a bill to permit same-sex marriage in New York State and a separate bill that would create a paid family leave program.

Under the governor's proposal, workers would be allowed to take off up to 12 weeks — and be paid up to \$170 a week from an employer-sponsored insurance fund — to care for an ill family member or a newborn child. The social proposals are highly controversial and may not make it through to the floor for a vote before the end of session.

I am very interested in hearing your views and welcome your input. Please feel free to contact me at hayesj@assembly.state.ny.us or call my office at 634-1895.



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