

letters

to the Editor

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Business grateful for help after fire

Thank you to the Amherst Police Department and the Williamsville Fire Department for their timely response to the fire on Saturday, June 2 at our Main Street location. Your quick response saved our restaurant and we are truly grateful.

Our sincere thanks and gratitude to Richard and Kimberly Worling, who were taking a walk down Main Street after their dinner at a local restaurant, noticed the smoke and called the Fire Department. You saved our business of 30 years from a major

disaster. You also saved 45 people their jobs, and we are all truly appreciative and extremely thankful.

We would also like to say thank you to all of our employees who worked so hard to get the restaurant back up and running. Your help and dedication mean a lot to us and we truly appreciate your commitment.

In closing, we would like to say thank you to all of our patrons, the news media and the reporters for the local newspapers for their positive support in reporting the fire. We appreciate all your calls of concern, and we look forward to serving you for (Please turn to page six)

Latest legislative session features few hits, many misses

When fully reviewing New York State's 2007 legislative session, you have to come to the realization that the slight progress made by our state lawmakers was overshadowed by one of the most disappointing ends of session in quite some time.

So to get a full understanding about what was accomplished — and more importantly, what wasn't accomplished — here's a look at the good, the bad and the ugly when it comes to legislative business in Albany:

The good: Some actual budget reform was achieved, most notably that member items are now required to be disclosed before they are put to a vote by the State Legislature.

The other progressive step taken was the decision to spoon-feed our elected officials loads of fiscal facts and figures in November as opposed to January, allowing for more number-crunching to be done in a more timely manner.

Much more still needs to be done when it comes to real reform when talking about the budget process, but this is progress and we must continue to hope that more is on the way in the very near future.

Also registering positively on the scorecard was workers' compensation reform. The changes to the workers' comp laws should save employers upwards of \$1 billion over the next several years by eliminating those expensive lifetime payments for claims that are categorized as permanent partial disabilities.

What's it mean to the bottom line for small business owners? Think in terms of 10 to 15 percent, maybe even more, in total savings in payments for employee insurance.

The bad: While more than a dozen bills thought to be on the cusp of being approved were nudged aside at the end of session, our illustrious senators did find time to advance almost \$500 million in requests made for pork barrel spending.

To add insult to injury, this group also made sure they were able to secure the necessary votes required to give themselves a pay raise.

The Senate also failed to confirm appointees to most of the state's major agencies, boards and commissions, including the SUNY Board of Trustees and the Empire State Development Corporation.

Also left undone, which garnered much interest

locally, is the planned closing of St. Joseph Hospital in Cheektowaga. The Legislature simply failed to act upon a bill that was co-sponsored by Assemblyman Dennis Gabryszak and Sens. Dale Volker and Bill Stachowski that would have helped pull St.

Joe's off the closing list issued earlier this year by the Berger Commission.

Since Gov. Eliot Spitzer had made it perfectly clear that he was going to veto the bill, a "Plan B" of sorts involving further discussions with hospital administrators and representatives from the office of the state's Health Commissioner was introduced.

The ugly: Simply put, the past month and a half of meetings in Albany saw very little action take place as lawmakers decided to walk away from the table and head home for the summer.

Specifically, a half dozen bills — namely Wicks Law reform, campaign finance reform, power plant sitting legislation, healthy schools legislation, public authorities reform and brownfields legislation — should have been addressed. So much has been said about the six bills listed above — particularly the Wicks Law and campaign finance proposals — and yet so little was accomplished.

Whether they want to admit it or not, our elected officials are obligated to address these issues on behalf of the taxpayers they represent and in the conscience of good government.

Yes, good government. A phrase that is so easy to say but so hard to emulate given the unacceptable and outrageous voting record of some of our elected officials. With all of this unfinished business still sitting on the table, it's amazing to think how these politicians can enjoy their summer vacation knowing they dropped the ball and left Albany knowing they had so little success doing what they get paid to do.

(Daniel Meyer is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community-based weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. 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.)



DAN MEYER

Political Columnist

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Last week's question:  
**Should the Town wait to cut some of the 9,500 trees?**

You said:  
**65% YES 35% NO**

How to reach The Bee

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Tree management plan aims to save as many trees as possible

I met an arborist, Jeremy Sayers, last week in a news conference called by Paul Maurer, leader of Re-Tree WNY, where he was asked, "What is the probability that the damaged trees will survive?" He said, "Trees are tough; they can't go to the doctor, so they find other ways to survive." He further added that in a storm in Rochester, 75 percent of the damaged trees revived themselves. My plan is to follow Sayers' observation and give our trees a chance.

Out of 65,000 trees that we have along our roads, 10,839 trees were damaged in the October storm. A county-appointed arborist evaluated each of the damaged trees and made the following recommendations:

- 1,097 of the damaged trees are in the high to severe risk category and are either dead or in critical condition, and
- The remaining 9,742 trees are in no risk to moderate risk category and are in poor, fair, good or very good condition.

My plan that I will send to the Town Board and to the highway superintendent is to fell 1,097 trees that pose a safety risk and are in either dead or in critical condition, and give the rest of the 9,742 trees a chance to survive for one year or more.

I have written to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the State Emergency Management Office to extend their payment deadline from Oct. 24, 2007 to Oct. 24, 2008. Both of our

U.S. senators have also written to FEMA to extend the deadline. In the next 16 months, each single tree will be evaluated for further action, and no tree will be felled just to meet FEMA's or SEMO's payment deadline.

While these 1,097 trees are being felled, we are planning the replanting of trees as soon as possible. Paul Maurer of Re-Tree WNY estimates a donation of 1,000 trees by his organization, and I will make a provision of another 1,000 trees in the 2008 budget. I have met many residents and received several phone calls, e-mails, and letters expressing concern on the felling of trees on their streets. I want to assure you that I will do all within my power as your supervisor to protect each of the trees that has the minimal chance of survival for as long as the neighbors desire. I fully realize you have grown and lived with your trees for many years, you love your trees, and they add to your property value.

I had proposed a resolution on Jan. 2, 2007 that the town's Tree Advisory Committee meet with the concerned neighbors and mail back their comments on each tree to the Highway Department. That resolution was forwarded to the highway superintendent for incorporating into his tree management policy. It has not yet been done, but my resolve to pursue your participation at every stage is stronger than it was. We will publish the trees to be felled on the town's Web site and wait for your comments.



SATISH MOHAN

Amherst Supervisor