

## letters

## to the Editor

dsherman@beeneews.com  
www.beeneews.com

## DPW does a great job during market

The farmers' market committee would like to thank the Village Department of Public Works for doing such a terrific job for our Market at the Mill. Not only do they set up our barricades early Friday morning, sweep, clean, make repairs and take care of our trash and recycle bins, they stop by before our market opens early on Saturday mornings to make sure

we're all set. Thanks guys, you're awesome.

**Ellie Grenauer, and Lynn and Phil Schwab**  
co-coordinators  
Williamsville

## Original Pancake House grateful for help after fire

Thank you to the Amherst Police Department and the Williamsville Fire Department  
(Please turn to page six)

## Correction

The obit photo for James R. Riedel was incorrectly placed with Gere Otterbein in last week's Bee.

EXCLUSIVE

## Bee Poll

www.AmherstBee.com

Click to vote on this Bee Poll TODAY!

## Would a multi-use project be good on Maple Road?

ONLINE POLL RESULTS  
VOTE

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

Last week's question:

**Have teens caused a disturbance in your neighborhood?**

You said:

**40% YES 60% 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.

## Amherst Bee

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**Trey Measer**, Publisher/President, e-mail: tmeaser@BeeNews.com  
**John J. Evans**, Executive Vice President, e-mail: jevans@BeeNews.com  
**David F. Sherman**, Managing Editor, e-mail: dsherman@BeeNews.com  
**Jessica Finch**, Associate Editor, e-mail: jfinch@BeeNews.com  
**Michael A. Measer**, Circulation Manager, e-mail: mmeaser@BeeNews.com  
**Dean T. Hutter**, Advertising Manager, e-mail: dhutter@BeeNews.com  
**Karl Scheitner**, Production Manager, e-mail: karls@BeeNews.com  
**Mary Anne Cappon**, Special Sections Manager, e-mail: macappon@BeeNews.com

Web sites: www.BeeNews.com & www.AmherstBee.com

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# In government, real debate is perception versus reality

With Buffalo's retired public works commissioner pleading guilty last week to criminal charges that he accepted trips from companies that had contracts with the city, the issue of ethics in local government is on the minds of many folks in Western New York.

Apparently, the practice of accepting weekend getaways to Florida, Las Vegas and other exotic destinations has been going on for several years, and it sounds like there may be more former city officials under investigation.

While there are no allegations that the trips Joseph Giambra took influenced any decision he made when he served as the public works chief, the real debate involving this ethics issue is all about perception versus reality.

So while Giambra's eight trips taken between 2003 and 2005 made headlines and provided plenty of fodder for discussions inside taverns, hair salons and grocery stores, it's a recent meeting that was hosted by Town of Orchard Park Councilwoman Deborah Yeomans that discussed the town's Board of Ethics that serves as the basis for an analysis of the different ways you can look at the philosophy of ethics at the town, village and even school board level of day-to-day government operations.

Some recent appointments in Orchard Park involving the town's Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals that were decided upon based on a pure political party line vote were the icing on the cake for Yeomans, who believes that the appearance of impropriety is clearly visible to many of the taxpayers she represents.

"People are crying for ethics reform," Yeomans said in one published report prior to her meeting on ethics held in the basement of Orchard Park Town Hall. Yeomans said it was during her door-to-door campaign last year when ethics became a hot topic. It was brought up by a number of different people as Yeomans tried to gauge what people wanted to see change and what they thought about the public officials representing them.

Yeomans and Town Supervisor Mary Travers Murphy have contended that the town's Board of Ethics made recommendations last year that stated someone who holds an office with a political party should not be able to also hold a compensated position with the town. Examples

of this alleged conflict of interest include Orchard Park's planning coordinator, who is also chairman of the town's Conservative Party.

Yeomans and Travers Murphy admit that there's nothing illegal or immoral about someone being active politically while also serving the town in

another capacity, but the duo does worry about public perception when talking about the head of a local political party also holding what amounts to a part-time job with the town.

The Republican majority of the Orchard Park Town Board, specifically Councilman David Kaczor, disagrees, saying there is no impropriety in the town and they see no cause for concern when talking about prominent political people holding compensated positions.

Kaczor believes each specific individual should be judged based on his or her job performance and that any potential conflict of interest should be weighed prior to anyone being appointed to a paid position.

Yeomans disagrees, saying members of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals establish and enforce townwide policies and procedures and wield what she identifies as "a tremendous amount of power."

It remains to be seen what will happen in Orchard Park, but a tip of the hat is in order for Yeomans having the courage to ask the questions her constituents want answered in hopes of getting a clear and concise response to the town's ethics code.

Which brings us back to Joe Giambra, not to be confused with Joel Giambra, although the whole topic of ethics and potential conflicts of interest has been associated with Erie County's executive in the past.

Perhaps it was Joe Giambra's attorney, speaking last week outside court just moments after his client pleaded guilty to three misdemeanor charges, who summed it up best.

"The impropriety is in the appearance," said Rodney Personius. "It looks bad for a public employee to accept these trips, because it looks as though your actions are being influenced."

Gee, ya think?

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

# Legislature breaks after disappointing session

The old adage used to predict the weather in March certainly applied to the State Legislature last week when it adjourned for the summer in gridlock. Coming in "like a lion" at the start of the new Spitzer administration earlier this year, the State Legislature passed meaningful ethics and lobbying reform, strengthened and improved the workers' compensation system, enacted stricter laws for confining violent sex predators and reformed parts of the budget process. It was a good start.

Regrettably, the 2007 session adjourned last week, and legislators left Albany "like a lamb" without achieving consensus on major issues important to Western New York taxpayers.

Negotiations to expand the DNA database to include samples taken from criminals convicted of any crime, not just serious felonies, did not result in an agreed-upon bill to send to Gov. Spitzer. There also was no agreement

on reinstating the death penalty for the murder of a police officer or corrections officer. On the economic front, no agreement — and no new law — to help facilitate the construction of new electric power facilities, and no consensus was reached on reforming the antiquated Wicks Law, which adds higher costs to public building projects. There was no agreement on campaign finance reform to encourage public trust in open government — and perhaps most astonishing, no new capital budget to invest state money in the rebuilding of local roads, bridges and important infrastructure to help increase the economic viability of the Erie-Niagara region.

The Assembly leadership did find time, howev-

er, to approve "one-house" social policies that will not become law anytime soon because of lack of support in the State Senate. By a vote of 85-61 (I voted no), the Assembly approved a gay marriage bill. The Assembly also approved a plan to allow terminally ill patients to legally smoke marijuana and advanced a proposal to create a new program for paid family leave time for all employees in the state, a measure strongly opposed by small businesses.

Amazingly, the Assembly even found time to pass one-house measures that would expand the benefits of our most-expensive-in-the-nation Medicaid program.

All in all, it was a great disappointment. Given the early promise of a session that also approved another round of property tax rebate checks for seniors and homeowners later this fall, too many important reforms were left undone. There is talk of a possible

return to session on July 16 or a call to special session that could come from the governor at any time. But as of this writing, that schedule remains uncertain.

What is certain is that legislative leaders let political infighting get in the way of accomplishing many needed government reforms for businesses and taxpayers in our region. I'll continue the fight to push for these and other badly needed reforms in the weeks and months ahead.

In the meantime, I would appreciate hearing your views on any matters involving state government. Please feel free to contact my office in Williamsville at 634-1895 or via e-mail at hayesj@assembly.state.ny.us.



**DAN MEYER**

Political Columnist



**JAMES P. HAYES**

New York State Assembly