

## letters

# to the Editor



dsherman@beeneews.com  
www.beeneews.com

## Schratz comments were out of line

Shame on you, Deputy Supervisor Shelly Schratz, for using such language in describing the Audubon Golf Course.

The reasons for the loss of revenue at the Amherst Course are not because the carts are priced too high. There are many other things to pick on, as stated at the beginning of the article of July 16. As a player at Audubon, which is a public course, I agree that the course needs a touch of tender loving care.

The greens for the most part are as good as or better than

some private courses. The sand traps could use some real sand or take them out in favor of bunkers. Some of the greens keepers and other maintenance people do a good job of maintaining the course. The issue of maintenance is another story that the Town Board has to tackle.

Positively speaking, the Amherst Audubon Golf Course is an asset to our town. It can hold its own with other public courses in our area. The Recreation Commission needs positive input on the Audubon Course.

Start by spending some of

(Please turn to page six)

# Paterson's dental association deal shows cavities still exist in Albany

While it should come as no surprise to anyone, the permeating culture of petty partisan politics, backroom deals and handshake-with-a-wink agreements is very much alive and well in Albany.

The latest example comes from some accusations that Gov. David Paterson is playing favorites while governing the operations of various state authorities and associations. The approval of one measure included in the latest stack of bills rubberstamped by the governor has me seriously doubting Paterson's motives while also sadly realizing that the country's most dysfunctional state government still has a very long way to go to cleaning up its act.

I'm not the only one criticizing Paterson. One elected official from downstate went so far as to say Paterson's placement of his John Hancock on a law involving state dentists is "nothing more than proof that corruption is alive and well in the state Legislature."

To summarize the facts as we know them, we must first realize that it is the power and influence of one of the state's chief lobbyists that helped to create a situation where Paterson's character and future political ambitions are being questioned by some political pundits.

Roy Lasky is a lobbyist who controls the New York State Dental Association. The man is well-compensated — his salary is believed to be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$300,000, and that doesn't even include various perks and benefits.

Recently, a small group of dentists from New York City began asking specific questions related to the annual dues they pay to be members of the dental association. Lasky didn't like the fact that these oral health service providers were questioning his authority and decision-making, so he quickly asked some state legislators to pass a bill that allowed Lasky to essentially take control of New York City's dental society and also allow Lasky to be able to have the option of taking over the annual New York dental conference, an event that helps to pull in millions of dollars in concession fees.

Lasky's actions have to be questioned since the legislation he wanted passed was approved by

the state Legislature, state Senate and Paterson without a problem, and conveniently almost \$350,000 has been donated to various politicians, election campaigns and political organizations by what is known as the "Empire Dental Political Action Committee."

Never heard of the EDPAC? According to a page on the New York State Dental Association's

Web site, EDPAC is a "bipartisan political action committee of New York State dentists that serves and protects the interests of NYSDA members."

If you are able to see past all of that garble and nonsense, you'll identify EDPAC as Lasky's place to store funds for elected officials who "take care of him." In other words, it's like the old saying of "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours."

But of course, we are not to believe that anything fishy is going on because EDPAC's mission statement also states that the organization "makes sure that

the voice of dentistry gets through to the right people in government, men and women of both political parties who understand and support the needs of the profession."

Pardon me as I take a big swig of mouthwash after that one. Lasky's biggest supporters are upset about a recent investigation by the New York Times of how quickly Lasky's bill got OK'd by the powers-that-be in Albany.

So how does Paterson fit into all of this? A quick check of what Paterson signed off on earlier this month found Lasky's bill receiving final approval by the governor on July 7.

On July 8, a check in the amount of \$25,000 was issued to the Paterson for Governor campaign fund, with the payoff ... errr, uh, I mean the "donation" coming from Lasky's dental association.

Paterson should be ashamed. People like Lasky are floating around all over Albany and they practically run Washington, but we should expect — and deserve — better from our highest elected official in the state.

(Daniel Meyer is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers of Western New York. Comments on this column can be sent via e-mail to: meyersmusings@gmail.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)



DAN MEYER

Political Columnist

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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  
Mary Anne Cappon, Advertising Sales Director, e-mail: macappon@BeeNews.com  
Linda Crist, Advertising Manager, e-mail: lcrist@BeeNews.com  
Karl Scheithir, Production Manager, e-mail: karls@BeeNews.com

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

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## Review of town employees' salaries and benefits

Amherst residents have often enquired about the salaries and wages the town pays to its employees. We will be publishing this information on the town's Web site.

The gross salaries include perks such as overtime, longevity, clothing and several other allowances but do not include payments for pension, health care, Social Security, workers' compensation, etc., which amount to 43 percent of the salaries for police and 32 percent for other employees.

The town's workforce is divided into five unions, elected officials and one exempt class.

The Civil Service Employees' Association had 246 members who worked more than 1,820 hours in 2007. Eleven employees have not joined but follow CSEA salaries. Their average salary and benefits amounted to \$50,100.

Three full-time elected officials: supervisor, highway superintendent, and town clerk, earned an average of \$73,600 in salaries and benefits. The Amherst Engineering Associates had 62 full-time employees with an average gross salary of \$53,500.

The exempt class had 38 full-time employees with average salaries and benefits of \$74,740. All department heads, their deputies, and some clerical staff belong to this class. The highest salary in this class was paid to the police chief, \$154,100. Four employees earned more than \$100,000.

The Central Fire Alarm Office Association had 10 employees with an average package of \$68,300. The Amherst Highway Employees' Association had 153 employees with an average package of \$58,330.

The Police Club had 148 officers in 2007 who

worked full time with an average salary of \$88,600. The 2007 salaries include contract raises negotiated in 2008. The annual benefits/perks include: overtime and court time, approximately \$700,000 per year; longevity, \$400,000; vacation buybacks, \$140,000; clothing allowances, \$210,000; sold holidays, \$440,000; and sick incentive \$105,000.

The police officers, in addition to the above, are also paid briefing time (\$570,000), education allowances (\$280,000), shift differentials (\$160,000), super holiday (\$60,000), shooting pay (\$110,000), and a lump retirement. They are entitled to up to 300 days sick pay at retirement. In 2007, the town paid \$696,000 for this benefit. The town contributes toward employees' pensions at the rate of approximately 24 percent of salary for police officers and 14 percent for other employees. The contributions vary by tier class. These payments amount to

\$6 million a year. The town also pays \$4 million for retirees' health care.

The hourly wage of all town employees excluding police calculates to \$26 per hour. With pension, health care and Social Security, this calculates to \$34 per hour. The police average \$37 per hour. With benefits, this totals \$53 per hour. The Regional Institute of the University at Buffalo reported 2006 Western New York per capita weekly income of \$689 or \$17.20 per hour.

Can Amherst taxpayers afford to pay their employees two to three times more than they themselves earn? Not for long. It makes sense for taxpayers to get together with their Town Board and employees to chart an affordable course, or else!



SATISH MOHAN

Amherst Supervisor