



Breaking down the budget

Brookhaven Town Board holds public hearing to consider 2024 budget

A4



VFW Post 3054 in East Setauket hosts its annual Veterans Day service on Saturday, Nov. 11.

Photos by Greg Catalano



Celebrate the season with 'A Christmas Carol' at Theatre Three

ALSO: LIM presents Dickens in the Carriage Museum, 'The Play That Goes Wrong' at SCCC

B1



Snapshots of reverence: East Setauket VFW honors generations of service

BY GREG CATALANO
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM


VFW Post 3054 in East Setauket hosted a moving

Veterans Day ceremony on Saturday, Nov. 11, paying tribute to U.S. service members and veterans of all generations.

After a performance of "The

Star-Spangled Banner" and a touching prayer, members of the Three Village community, including Scouts, Daisies and members of the East Setauket

Fire Department, among others, placed wreaths in tribute to all the local community members for their military service over the years.



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Port Jeff’s deputy mayor announces run for New York State Assembly

BY RAYMOND JANIS
EDITOR1@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Just over a week after Election Day, the 2024 election season is already underway.

Village of Port Jefferson Deputy Mayor Rebecca Kassay has exclusively announced her campaign for New York State’s 4th Assembly District. She is running as a Democrat.

The 4th District seat is currently held by New York State Assemblyman Ed Flood (R-Port Jefferson), who unseated former Assemblyman — and Suffolk County Legislator-elect — Steve Englebright (D-Setauket) in 2022, who had occupied the seat since 1992.

Kassay entered the Village of Port Jefferson Board of Trustees in 2020 and was appointed deputy mayor earlier this year. During her tenure in village government, she has served as trustee liaison to the Building Department and Planning Board; the Conservation Advisory, Six-Acre Park and Tree committees; and was appointed the village’s inaugural sustainability commissioner.

Before entering public life, she worked as a youth environmental volunteer program director at Avalon Park and Preserve in Stony Brook. She is also a small business owner, operating The Fox and Owl Inn bed-and-breakfast on Main Street in Port Jefferson with her husband Andrew Thomas since 2014.

“I’m running for the New York State Assembly because we need leaders who understand that governance which truly reflects the voices, needs and concerns of their constituents starts with listening,” Kassay said in a statement. “In the village government, there are no national political party affiliations. I am practiced in working with anybody who is interested in pursuing commonsense, balanced solutions to ongoing challenges.”

Kassay described several quality-of-life concerns as “screaming for representation” in Albany, such as housing scarcity and the unaffordable standard of living in District 4. She said the state government must help create housing opportunities while conforming to the existing suburban character of local communities.

“I know that one-size-fits-all plans and

mandates have tried to come down from the state, and while they try to address problems, they’re not suitable for the variety of unique communities within our area,” she said in an interview. “We need to find ways that we can support the creation of more housing opportunities for the middle class while preserving that suburban lifestyle.”

The Port Jeff deputy mayor identified various environmental challenges facing the 4th District, offering to leverage her environmental advocacy background toward climate-resilient policies.

“I really look at climate resilience as something that’s part of almost every dynamic conversation that government is having at this point,” she indicated.

Kassay referred to health care as another policy concern, citing soaring health care expenses as a barrier to entrepreneurship and economic development. “A lot of folks here who might set out as entrepreneurs or small business owners might be held back by health insurance as a barrier, so I really want to work to address that and make that more affordable for small business owners and entrepreneurs, specifically, but also for everyone else who is interacting with the state health insurance market,” she said.

Among other ideas, Kassay said she would use the office to pursue greater public investment in mental health services, target the opioid crisis, apply pressure on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for improved services along the Port Jefferson Branch of the Long Island Rail Road and expand coordination between the state and local levels of government.

Kassay’s current term as village trustee expires in July 2024. She stated she will not seek reelection for village office.

“I really look forward to serving not only Port Jefferson village residents but the residents throughout the district of AD4 from Stony Brook and all the way down to Gordon Heights, using the skills and relationships I’ve built at the village level and leveraging those skills all throughout the district,” she said.

To read Kassay’s entire statement, please visit tbrnewsmedia.com.

2023

PEOPLE
of the YEAR

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we honor the people who have contributed in the communities we serve.

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Please include your name and contact information,
the name and contact information of the individual you’re nominating
and why he or she deserves to be a Person of the Year.

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2023

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Upset residents stall removal of sheep and elderly pony at Sherwood-Jayne Farm

BY MALLIE JANE KIM
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Local residents rallied outside Sherwood-Jayne Farm in East Setauket Wednesday, Nov. 8, when representatives from Preservation Long Island — the nonprofit that owns the farm and its animals — made an unexpected attempt to remove the elderly pony and four sheep that live there.

The impromptu protest was confrontational and tense, with caretaker Susanna Gatz visibly distressed, and PLI executive director Alexandra Wolfe expressing frustration. Suffolk County police officers who cleared the 20 or so people out of the pasture area as requested by Wolfe also worked to maintain a calm atmosphere where possible.

In the end, the sheep and pony were spooked amid the tension, so the Save-A-Pet representative engaged to move the animals wouldn't do so while they



Locals confront Preservation Long Island on Wednesday, Nov. 8, during the nonprofit's attempted removal of the animals at Sherwood-Jayne Farm in East Setauket. Photo by Mallie Jane Kim

were agitated, and left the scene.

PLI has long planned to rehome its animals, but paused for review in August after significant community outcry. Gatz has lived on the property and cared for the sheep and pony for more than eight years. She and other local residents have been hoping the sheep

a 15-minute notice to start moving the animals is not fair."

Suffolk County Legislator-elect Steve Englebright (D-Setauket) attempted to help mediate and said he had a productive start to a conversation with Wolfe. He explained that the animals are an important educational

and pony could live out the rest of their lives there.

On Nov. 8, Wolfe told Gatz the animals would leave just minutes before a Save-A-Pet van arrived to transport them, though PLI's press team said they tried to contact her for several hours prior.

Gatz said she felt blindsided. "To show up here today with

and cultural resource for the community, but that he also understands PLI is essentially a collection of small museums and not in the business of caring for live creatures.

"She's unhappy because the ownership that they have of these animals is not part of their mission," he said, but added, "There has to be a solution other than removing the animals."

Englebright said Wolfe expressed willingness for the idea of a separate organization owning and taking charge of animals on the property — though as police cleared people out of the pasture area and the protest grew heated with sobs, yelling and even a bit of shoving, Wolfe told the crowd she did not want the current animals to be part of any discussion.

Gatz's sister, Sharon Philbrick, pulled three of her children out of school so they could come say goodbye to the animals, but police were no longer allowing people to go near the barn by the time they arrived. The kids

were crying, and one ran past police officers to get close. "They've been around these animals their whole lives," Philbrick said, adding that they'd held the sheep when they were little lambs. "The animals know them."

PLI explained in a fact sheet provided to TBR News Media that the sheep are slated to get a private enclosure at Berkshire Farm Sanctuary, a nonprofit farm in Massachusetts that rescues and rehabilitates "abused and neglected companion and farm animals," according to its website.

Snowball, the old white pony, PLI's fact sheet indicated, would move to a private farm "a short distance away from the Sherwood-Jayne Farm," and would have access to another elderly pony and 24-hour veterinary care.

PLI provided a statement Thursday suggesting it still planned to move the animals, without indicating when.

"Regrettably, the emotions of our property custodian and some protesters disrupted the attempt to gently move the

STORY CONTINUED ON PAGE A5

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Diners, Drive-in's
& Dives**

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Brookhaven Town Board holds public hearing on 2024 budget

BY SAMANTHA RUTT
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Brookhaven Town Board held a public hearing on Thursday, Nov. 9, to consider the 2024-2028 Preliminary Capital Budget, exclusive of special districts.

The Preliminary Capital Budget is a plan for capital expenditures, which are projects expected to have a useful life of more than one year. The budget includes projects such as road repairs, parks improvements, building renovations and landfill expansion.

The town's commissioner of finance, Tamara Branson, opened the hearing by presenting highlights of the 2024 preliminary operating budget. The total appropriations for the operating budget amount to just over \$335 million. This represents an increase in spending of 1.6%, with a rise in the town property tax levy of about 1%.

In her presentation, Branson noted the preliminary budget will use no fund balance to balance the budget in the seven major tax districts. Outgoing town Supervisor Ed Romaine (R) — who is leaving office later this year to become Suffolk County executive — praised the budget.

"No fund balance has been used," he said. "It's all structurally balanced," adding, "I think that's important because some people lose that. Sometimes, you see towns using the fund balance or the reserves to balance a budget. We have not done that for years."

The finance commissioner mentioned that the preliminary budget complies with New York State's 2% levy cap, the town's Tax Rate and Debt Management Cap and all fund balance policies adopted by the Town Board.

Branson's presentation also noted no reduction in constituent services or total full-time staffing. The presentation

further pointed out that the preliminary budget would lower property taxes across the nine ambulance districts by a combined 4.6%.

In the preliminary operating budget townwide summary, Branson noted the tax levy to be almost \$195 million. Contrarily, to help balance the budget, the non-property tax revenues will equate to \$140 million. To this, the finance commissioner commented on the work of the town Finance Department to help stabilize the budget.

"This is the area we have all been working on for the past decade," Branson said. "To grow the non-property tax revenues."

Romaine emphasized the importance of generating revenue from other sources, such as renewable energy.

"We want to encourage revenues from other sources, like solar," he noted. "The more we grow non-property tax revenue, the less people have to pay — or the less we have to

raise property taxes."

Property taxes hold the most significant of the six major budget funds, supporting 54.5% of the total revenues. Second to property taxes, the town's landfill, recycling and sustainability management contribute 22.3%. Building, fire prevention, and planning/environmental comprise the next biggest portion at 12.7%. The remainder of the total revenue includes parks, franchises, mortgage tax and state aid.

The preliminary budget's planned expenditures are dedicated to employee compensation, employee benefits, contractual and equipment, and debt service. Romaine commented on the reduction of debt service, noting that the percentage of the town's expenditures on debt service has decreased by 5% in the last decade.

The budget will feature new bond and reserve-funded projects totaling \$47.9 million. Most of this sum will be allocated to highway development and improvement, focusing on roads,

drainage, traffic safety, and updated machinery and equipment.

The remaining funds will support other projects such as parks and recreation facilities and equipment, open space preservation, public safety, planning and environmental, and landfill infrastructure improvements.

According to Romaine's report of Sept. 29, the operating budget "reduces landfill revenues to reflect loss of volumes in 2023" and "grows the Landfill Post-Closure Reserve by \$1 million to an anticipated \$26 million."

"I think this is a good budget," the departing town supervisor indicated. "It is a very stable budget. It holds taxes very low — far below the rate of inflation — and allows us to move forward into the future."

The board will consider the 2024-2028 Preliminary Capital Budget, exclusive of all special districts, during a public meeting on Thursday, Nov. 16.

To view the full hearing, please visit brookhavenny.gov/meetings.

BY CAROLYN SACKSTEIN
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

I am a consumer of news. In addition to writing for TBR News Media, I read, watch and listen to various news formats. The troubling reports of harassment and intimidation of poll workers across this country have both saddened and angered me.

I have long believed that citizens must actively engage in the democratic process. I get a thrill each time I vote. And so, it became incumbent upon me to do more than just vote and donate to organizations that promote the election process.

My journey to do more started in September when I participated in a League of Women Voters of Suffolk County event in Patchogue. After learning that there was a shortage of election workers, I was determined to do my part.

After the event, during which I handed out voter registration forms and voter information literature, I drove to the Suffolk County Board of Elections at 700 Yaphank Ave. in Yaphank. I was



Voting booths at Rocky Point High School. File photo by Kyle Barr

greeted by a friendly and professional staff, who assisted me in signing up for a position as an election inspector.

They verified that I met the requirements. The staff asked which of the yearly training dates I would prefer to attend. I was then informed that I would receive a letter confirming the date, place and time of my training.

Training occurred at Brookhaven Town Hall and was conducted by a SCBOE employee. Each trainee received a detailed booklet. The three-hour class covered matters of election law. The procedures for

opening and closing the election site were quite detailed.

Yes, there was a test at the end of the class. Each prospective election inspector was required to pass the test before being certified and sworn in with an oath of office. Election inspectors are compensated for required training sessions and when they work on early-voting days and on Election Day at an assigned polling site. Before leaving, we were told to expect a letter in October that would inform us to report to our assigned site at 5 a.m. on Election Day.

My experience as a first-time poll worker

On Tuesday, Nov. 7, I walked into my assigned polling site at 4:57 a.m. It was only five minutes from my house. An experienced co-worker greeted me. As the three other workers arrived, we began the setup process. We were fortunate in that our location served only one election district. Other sites may have multiple election districts.

Our first voter arrived seconds after 6 a.m. The remainder of the day passed as a continuous stream of voters moved through the signature verification process and received their ballots. Our experienced coordinator helped those who needed assistance with a variety of issues.

Four people did not show up to work. As a result of being short-handed, we did not have any "breaks." We watched for a lull in the line so we could go to the restroom. Rarely was the line backed up, and never by more than about seven people.

Next year, the demand for poll workers will be greater due to an expected larger turnout.

The main complaint was from people who did not recall getting instructions on their polling location and arrived at the wrong place. We

verified their polling site and, if needed, provided directions.

The voting public was courteous, and many thanked us for our efforts. One voter overheard our coordinator mention to a co-worker that he had not eaten all day. The voter returned with a dozen donuts to be shared. His appreciation and kindness made the long day worthwhile.

Polls closed at 9 p.m. We packed up and secured all equipment and ballots. Our day ended at 11 p.m.

As a first-timer, I had been a bit anxious. I was blessed with patient, helpful and supportive co-workers. My primary takeaway? Becoming an election inspector was worthwhile, fulfilling and deeply satisfying. I felt safe.

I encourage everyone who qualifies to become an election inspector. It is a singularly edifying and enriching experience. To lend a helping hand for the betterment of our democracy, please visit www.elections.ny.gov/becomepollworker.html.

The writer is a reporter for TBR News Media.

Sherwood-Jayne Farm
Continued from page A3

animals yesterday, and that effort had to be paused. We continue to believe that Berkshire Farm Sanctuary will provide the humane and caring environment we seek for the grazing animals,” the statement read.

Compliance issues
for Sherwood-Jayne

In an additional layer of complication for PLI, a Sept. 8 letter from the county procured by TBR News Media informed them the property is out of compliance with the Farmland Preservation Development Rights Program. Suffolk

County and the Town of Brookhaven purchased development rights to the 10.6-acre farm parcel in 2003, requiring Sherwood-Jayne to maintain a working commercial farm. The county also owns the 36 acres directly north of the property.

A county statute about the program stipulates “no owner shall leave agricultural land uncultivated and not engage in agricultural production ... for more than two consecutive years.”

The letter also informed PLI it needs to apply for special-use permits to host events like the recent Baseball on the Farm, and the nonprofit needs to discontinue the practice of allowing nearby schools and camps to use the field for overflow parking.

According to PLI’s fact sheet, the

organization met with Mikael Kerr, the county’s farmland and open space supervisor, Sept. 30 to talk through options of bringing the property into compliance with the program.

PLI has not provided details about those options, but it will need to create a plan to put forward for approval by the county’s farmland committee.

Though there was no indication the current animals staying at the farm would hinder that process, the effort to move the animals last Wednesday made clear the organization is so far not interested in rethinking the decision.

“We have made arrangements to rehome our animals to a private sanctuary, where they will peacefully live out the rest of their days in a beautiful, park-like environment,” PLI

said in a statement.

But some area residents think the animals should stay. One protester, Judy Wilson, who has helped feed the animals during times Gatz needed coverage, twisted a lock of the pony’s coarse white tail she found in the grass as she watched the situation unfold.

“What has happened today is atrocious,” she said. “The animals don’t need rescuing.”

Herb Mones, land use chair of the Three Village Civic Association, also came to the farm to show support. He took issue with the way the nonprofit handled a delicate situation, because the last the community heard, the plan to move the animals was on pause.

“We are quite shocked that something like this would happen by

any organization that depends upon Long Island communities’ support,” said Mones, who is also president of the Three Village Community Trust, another organization that acquires and preserves local properties of historical importance. “These are really actions that go beyond anything that’s reasonable. It just amazes me.”

Gatz said she was touched that so many neighbors and friends stopped by — some who noticed the commotion while driving by and others who got calls to support the effort to keep the animals at the farm.

“People love this place, and they care about these animals,” she said. “I want them to stay here. This is their home, and I don’t know why [PLI] doesn’t understand that.”

LEGALS

To Place A Legal Notice
Email: legals@tbrnewsmedia.com

Notice of formation of The Law Offices of Seth M. Weinberg, PLLC. Arts of Org. filed with Secretary of State of New York (SSNY) on 10/11/2023. Office location: Suffolk County. SSNY has been designated as agent of the LLC upon whom process against it may be served. SSNY shall mail a copy of the process to the LLC: 17 Robert Crescent, Stony Brook, New York 11790. Purpose: Any lawful purpose.

172620 10/26 6x vth

VILLAGE OF OLD FIELD
ELECTION 2024

The Board of Trustees of the Incorporated Village of Old Field, Suffolk County, New York at a meeting of said Board duly called and held on Tuesday, November 14 2023, unanimously adopted the following resolutions pertaining to the registration of all persons eligible to vote and the offices to be filled at the annual Village Election to be held on Tuesday, March 19, 2024:

RESOLVED, that there shall be no Village registration day for Village elections pursuant to Subdivision 3 of Section 15-118 of the Election Law, and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that only those persons registered to vote with the Board of Elections of Suffolk County shall be eligible to vote, and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the next general election for the Incorporated Village of Old Field, Suffolk County, New York, shall be held at the Keeper’s Cottage located at 207 Old Field Place in said Village on Tuesday, March 19, 2024, that the hours of opening and closing the polls thereof shall be 12:00 noon and 9:00 P.M. respectively and that during such period of nine consecutive hours the polls shall be kept open for the purpose of choosing and electing the following officers:

Mayor, and two Trustee positions, each for a term of two years

RESOLVED, that the following be, and they are hereby, designated and appointed to act as Inspectors of Election for a fee of \$160.00 per person, with Carol Schraut presiding as Chairperson thereof: Carol Schraut, Chairperson and Marianne Feller.

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Clerk of the Village be, and hereby is directed to prepare a proper notice of said annual election pursuant to Section 15-104 of the Election Law and to cause said notice to be published in said Village Times containing the date of the election and the polling place; the hours during which the polls shall be open; the names and addresses of all those who have been duly nominated

whose certificate of petition of nomination has been duly filed with said Village Clerk and the term of such office for which they have been so nominated, an abstract of any proposition to be voted upon, if any, and to cause a printed copy thereof to be posted conspicuously in at least six (6) public places in the Village at least one (1) day before said election.

174120 11/16 1x vth

ELECCIÓN DE LA VILLA DE
OLD FIELD 2024

La Junta de Fideicomisarios de Incorporated Villa de Old Field, condado de Suffolk, Nueva York, en una reunión de dicha junta debidamente convocada y realizada el martes 14 de noviembre de 2023, adoptó de forma unánime las siguientes resoluciones con respecto al registro de todas las personas elegibles para votar y los cargos a ocupar en la elección de la localidad a realizarse el 19 de marzo de 2024:

SE RESUELVE que no habrá día de registro en la localidad para las elecciones de la Villa de conformidad con la Subdivisión 3 de la Sección 15-118 de la Ley de Elecciones; y

TAMBIÉN SE RESUELVE que solo las personas registradas para votar en la Junta Electoral del condado de Suffolk serán elegibles para votar; y

TAMBIÉN SE RESUELVE que la próxima elección general de Incorporated Villa de Old Field, condado de Suffolk, Nueva York, se llevará a cabo en Keeper’s Cottage, ubicado en 207 Old Field Place en dicha localidad el martes 19 de marzo de 2024; que los horarios de apertura y cierre de las urnas de dicha elección serán entre las 12:00 p. m. y las 9:00 p. m. respectivamente; y que, durante dicho período de nueve horas consecutivas, las urnas permanecerán abiertas para votar y elegir candidatos para los siguientes cargos:

Alcalde y dos fideicomisarios, cada uno para un mandato de dos años

SE RESUELVE que las siguientes personas quedan por la presente designadas para actuar como inspectores de la elección, por una tarifa de \$160.00 por persona, con Carol Schraut como presidenta de la misma: Carol Schraut, presidenta, y Marianne Feller.

TAMBIÉN SE RESUELVE que la Secretaría de la localidad por la presente está autorizada a preparar un aviso adecuado de dicha elección anual según la Sección 15-104 de la Ley de Elecciones y hacer que dicho aviso se publique en Village Times e indique la fecha de la elección y el lugar de votación, el horario

durante el cual las urnas estarán habilitadas, los nombres y las direcciones de todos aquellos que han sido debidamente nominados y cuyos certificados de solicitud de nominación han sido presentados debidamente ante dicha Secretaría de la localidad, el mandato de dichos cargos para los que han sido nominados y un resumen de las propuestas a votar, si las hubiera, e imprimir una copia del mismo y publicarla visiblemente en al menos seis (6) lugares públicos en la localidad al menos un (1) día antes de dicha elección.

174740 11/16 1x vth

Notice of Formation of Spyrou Consulting LLC. Articles of Organization filed with Secretary of State of New York (SSNY) on 8/10/2023. Office location: Suffolk County. SSNY is designated as agent of LLC upon whom process against it may be served. SSNY shall mail process to: PO Box 1033, Setauket, NY 11733. Purpose: any lawful act or activity.

177300 11/16 6x vth

VILLAGE OF POQUOTT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ON A LOCAL LAW OF 2023 AMENDING SECTION 46-10 FEES OF THE POQUOTT

VILLAGE CODE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION PUBLIC HEARING TO BE HELD IN PERSON AND VIRTUALLY BY GOTO MEETINGS

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on December 4, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. at the Poquott Village Hall, 45 Birchwood Avenue, Poquott, New York, 11733 and by GOTOMEETING, the Board of Trustees of the Village of Poquott will hold a public hearing on a proposed local law of 2023, the title of which is “Local Law No. of 2023, a Local Law Amending Section 46-10 Fees of the Poquott Village Code Building and Construction.

Please take notice that the GOTOMEETING link and instructions will be available on the Village of Poquott website prior to the public hearing or accessed by dialing +1 (224) 501-3412 / Access Code: 740-776-765

The subject and purpose of the local law is to amend Section 46-10 with regard to changes in the policies of the Village of Poquott regarding fees.

Dated: November 9, 2023

Jessica Battani
Village Clerk
Village of Poquott
45 Birchwood Ave.
Poquott, New York 11733

177830 11/16 1x vth

Perspective
Continued from page A18

(R-NY) was called “Senator Pothole” because he was known to personally get involved to fix issues in the local community. His successor, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), has copied that business model to a tee.

Look, there are a litany of other issues including fusion voting (the practice should be legislatively banned by the state delegation) and money in local politics (some of these career politicians have more money than people running for Congress in other

states). But at the end of the day, we have to cultivate community ties. My councilmember, Jonathan Kornreich (D-Stony Brook), was a school board member and civic leader before becoming councilmember.

As we analyze the results of the election and agonize over how we repair our relationship with the electorate, let’s remember there is no replacement for local community involvement in the very fabric of the issues that affect our neighborhoods.

The writer is the chair of the Brookhaven Town Democratic Committee.

POLICE
BLOTTER

The following incidents have been reported by Suffolk County Police:

Man injured in Mount Sinai car crash

Suffolk County Police Sixth Squad detectives are investigating a three-vehicle crash that left a man critically injured in Mount Sinai on Nov. 14.

Ronald Indelicato was stopped in traffic in a 2022 Nissan Maxima southbound on County Road 83, near Canal Road, when his vehicle was struck from behind by a 2022 Chevrolet Cruz being driven by Jonathan Esposito at approximately 3:40 p.m. Indelicato’s vehicle then struck a 2018 Honda Pilot driven by Paul Abbruzzese, that was stopped in front of the Nissan.

Indelicato, 77, of Coram, was transported to Stony Brook University Hospital in critical condition. Esposito, 37, of Ridge, was uninjured. Abbruzzese, 68, of Mount Sinai, and an adult passenger in the Honda were uninjured.

All three vehicles were impounded for safety checks. Detectives are asking anyone with information about this crash to call Sixth Squad Detectives at 631-854-8652.

Holtsville man indicted for leaving scene of crash that killed pedestrian

Suffolk County District Attorney Raymond A. Tierney announced that Steven Syrop, 52, of Holtsville, was indicted for Leaving the Scene of an Incident Without Reporting, which resulted in the death of 42-year-old Jennifer Bianco, of Bay Shore, in May 2023.

According to the investigation, on May 21, 2023, at approximately 12:00 a.m., Syrop was driving a blue 2020 Chevy Silverado southbound on North Ocean Avenue in Holtsville when he allegedly struck Bianco, who was walking on the shoulder of the roadway. Syrop then left the scene without stopping or rendering aid to Bianco and failed to report the collision to law enforcement. Bianco died at the scene as a result of the injuries she sustained from the crash.

Car parts found by law enforcement along the shoulder of the road where the collision occurred matched the damage to the defendant’s car, which was found parked at his home the day after the incident.

Porch pirate strikes Setauket

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Sixth Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate the man who allegedly stole a package containing an iPhone from the porch of a Vento Lane home in Setauket on October 19 at approximately noon. The man fled in a black SUV.

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers offers a **cash reward** for information that leads to an arrest. Anyone with information about these incidents can contact Suffolk County Crime Stoppers to submit an anonymous tip by calling 1-800-220-TIPS.

CAUGHT ON CAMERA



Do you recognize this woman? Photo from SCPD

Wanted for petit larceny

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Sixth Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate a woman who allegedly stole \$300 worth of clothing from T.J. Maxx, located at 5125 Nesconset Highway in Port Jefferson Station, on October 19.



Do you recognize this man? Photo from SCPD

Wanted for petit larceny

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Sixth Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate the man who allegedly stole merchandise from GNC, located at 2322 North Ocean Ave. in Farmingville, on November 6.

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— COMPILED BY HEIDI SUTTON



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First of its kind: Brookhaven Town Board to review new zoning category for Jefferson Plaza in Port Jeff Station

BY RAYMOND JANIS
EDITOR1@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Port Jefferson Station/Terryville is approaching a potentially community-defining transformation as the Brookhaven Town Board weighs the future redevelopment of the Jefferson Plaza shopping center, owned by Islandia-based Staller Associates.

Later this month, the board will consider rezoning the 10-acre parcel at the intersection of state Route 112 and Terryville Road to a Commercial Redevelopment District, or CRD, a new classification within the town's Zoning Code. Jefferson Plaza would be the first property in town history to receive this designation if approved.

Enacted in 2020, the CRD enables mixed-use development along parcels of over 5 acres in size. According to the code, the CRD aims "to create the type of planning and zoning flexibility which is necessary to stimulate the revitalization of abandoned, vacant or underutilized commercial shopping center, bowling alley and health club properties."

Town of Brookhaven Councilmember Jonathan Kornreich (D-Stony Brook) represents Port Jefferson Station on the Town Board. In an exclusive interview, he summarized the CRD's purpose as "more housing, less commercial space, generally."

"The local government has created an incentive to spur redevelopment," he said. "But it hasn't been used yet, so we're trying to use it now."

Commercial decline

Kornreich said this new approach to commercial revitalization is guided by a sequence of "extinction events" occurring within the local retail market.

Since the establishment of these local downtowns in the previous century and even earlier, Kornreich identified the emergence of automobile culture and the growth of large box stores as the first threat to traditional mom-and-pop storefronts and downtown economies. In the wake of this first extinction event, "retail took a hit that it never really recovered from," Kornreich said.

Retail's downward trajectory was further exacerbated by e-commerce, which began to put even the big box stores and large retailers out of business. "And then, of course, COVID came, and that hit commercial real estate and retail," the councilmember noted.

Confronting the many changes reshaping the commercial landscape, Kornreich said the CRD would help spur commercial redevelopment.

"This is our existential challenge: How do we help guide the redevelopment of our community so it can be healthy, so that it can thrive, and so that people can afford to live here and have a good quality of life," he said.

Richard Murdocco is an adjunct professor in the Department of Political Science at Stony

Brook University, specializing in land use, real estate markets, economic development and environmental policy. Given the current pressures upon the commercial sector, Murdocco concluded that "these antiquated shopping

centers need a redo."

While redevelopment has traditionally elicited local opposition from nearby residents, Murdocco suggests that various projects throughout the region have gained traction among locals.



Town of Brookhaven Councilmember Jonathan Kornreich, right photo, speaks to a crowd of residents assembled at the Jefferson Plaza shopping center in Port Jefferson Station on Sunday, Nov. 12. Photos by Carolyn Sackstein



Locals rally outside Jefferson Plaza over proposed revitalization

BY CAROLYN SACKSTEIN
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

On the first cold day of the season on Sunday, Nov. 12, locals gathered in the parking lot of Jefferson Plaza along Route 112 in Port Jeff Station to discuss the proposed revitalization of the plaza.

In the days before the gathering, Paul Sagliocca and members of the Port Jefferson Station/Terryville Civic Association canvassed the neighborhoods surrounding the shopping center. This preparation brought out roughly 80 residents.

Sagliocca was joined by fellow civic members Lou Antoniello and Jerry Maxim. Town of Brookhaven Councilmember Jonathan Kornreich (D-Stony Brook) spoke to the crowd and Suffolk County Legislator-elect Steve Englebright (D-Setauket) — both representing PJS/T in their respective districts — listened to the concerns of attendees.

The speakers called for residents to attend PJSTCA's upcoming meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 28, at 7 p.m. at Comsewogue Library. They especially urged residents to speak up during an upcoming meeting of the Brookhaven Town Board to consider a proposed change of zone to a new Commercial Redevelopment District classification on Thursday, Nov. 30.

Questions raised

Owned by Staller Associates, Jefferson Plaza is currently zoned for commercial use. Staller must seek zoning changes from Brookhaven Town for mixed-use development of the property. The proposed revitalization calls for 263 residential units in a four-story structure.

Sagliocca suggested that residents to the west were anxious that the new apartments would have

sightlines into their yards and windows. Critics also expressed concerns over increased traffic and possibly rerouting traffic with one-way streets, making accessing their homes inconvenient.

Others raised concern over the impact of potentially many new residents on the environment, especially the aquifer. They questioned how much more stress the local environment could bear.

Another concern was the blocking of the sun by the height of the new structure. Maxim called for a "shade study" to determine how far the shade would extend into the neighborhood. Sagliocca spoke of the impact on Mather and St. Charles hospitals in Port Jefferson, which serve Coram, Selden and the greater Port Jefferson area. Kornreich emphasized the need for a traffic study to be conducted independently and objectively.

Maxim highlighted the potential impact of the proposed units on the Comsewogue School District.

Antoniello explained, "I'm not saying we don't need multifamily housing, but you can't have it dictated by the people up in Albany. Right now, the development they want for this area is really land abuse, not land use. They are looking for a density that is three times the allowable density that the Town of Brookhaven allows. This will set a precedent for every multifamily project that occurs in Port Jeff Station, Terryville and Port Jefferson village."

He added, "As per our hamlet and [commercial] hub study, over 80% of the people questioned said they didn't want multifamily units. We're now taking studies which cost combined over a hundred thousand dollars. We are throwing them in the trash. Those are our bibles. We have to do it right, we don't have a choice."

"It seems to me that a lot of these redevelopment projects are starting to gain momentum because the property and the blight are so large," he said. "These are significant pieces of property," adding, "Government responded to the need for adaptive reuse, and now there's a legal mechanism through the zoning district on which to do that."

Questions raised

The push for commercial redevelopment has met with scrutiny from some.

Ira Costell, president of the Port Jefferson Station/Terryville Civic Association, raised several questions about the Jefferson Plaza proposal.

The CRD "hasn't been used previously, and this does seem to be the test case," he said. "In my estimation, it's the lynchpin for further development in our community, so that's why it's essential that we get this right and not rush to judgment."

"To address those things, I think we need better community input," he added. To generate such input, he has asked residents to attend the civic's upcoming meeting at Comsewogue Public Library on Tuesday, Nov. 28, at 7 p.m.

Local civic members are ringing the alarm over the CRD in the neighboring Three Village community. Herb Mones, land use chair of the Three Village Civic Association, highlighted the need to remediate commercial blight but suggested the CRD code is too developer-centric.

"On every level, the intention of redeveloping neglected or failing shopping centers is an admirable goal," he said. "But the way that the code is written allows for really unprecedented development that has a tremendous negative effect on communities that are impacted by the density that results."

Mones said the language of the CRD code is "so vague, so arbitrary and so capricious that it could be applied to virtually any shopping center in the Town of Brookhaven."

Based on the statute, which incentivizes redevelopment of blighted properties through relaxed land use standards, Mones said the CRD code "encourages landowners to purposely neglect their properties in order to promote this eventual redevelopment."

George Hoffman, also a member of TVCA, concurred with Mones, referring to the CRD code as "a very vague law that I think was done in haste."

"It was really a code change that was done when we didn't know what was going to happen with COVID," Hoffman said. "I think it really has to be reevaluated, and I don't think it works in this situation here" at Jefferson Plaza.

Given that Jefferson Plaza would be the first parcel listed as a CRD, he added that this matter has implications for residents townwide.

"If they use this code to the maximum allowable density, I think it's going to set the standard of a new suburban model for development," he said.

The Town Board will consider the proposed change of zone for the Jefferson Plaza property on Thursday, Nov. 30, at 5 p.m.

Flame out: Ward Melville football's title defense ends in semis

BY STEVEN ZAITZ
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

In a game of punch-counterpunch, it was the Sachem North football team that got last licks against Ward Melville last Friday night in Lake Ronkonkoma, knocking the Patriots out of the playoffs and ending their season.

Sachem North running back Lucas Singleton's six-yard touchdown run with two minutes left in the fourth quarter propelled the Flaming Arrows to a 27-21 victory in the Suffolk Conference I semifinal game. They will face top-seeded William Floyd, who destroyed Longwood 49-13 on Saturday, at Stony Brook University to decide the Suffolk County championship for Conference I. This will be Sachem's first trip to the

both teams, Ward Melville managed to answer Sachem North touchdown for touchdown, erasing seven-point deficits on three separate occasions. But the Patriots were unable to stop the Flaming Arrows on 3rd down in the game-deciding drive that led to their postseason ouster.

Arrow QB Anthony Vino, who missed the final six games of the regular season due to injury, launched the first salvo in this one, hitting WR Brayden Tappin for a 40-yard score to start the game. Patriot QB Ethan Burgos hopped through a small crease and sprung himself 49 yards for a game-tying touchdown later in the first quarter.

WR Shane Reilly got behind the Ward Melville defense and Vino hit him for a 36-yard score midway through the

Morgan that deflected off the helmet of teammate Griffin Kramer, went straight up in the air and fell into the arms of a surprised and thankful Morgan, who was brought down at the Sachem 43-yard line.

Six plays later, Burgos took it in to tie the score at 14 with a minute to go in the half. It would become untied in short order at the start of the third quarter.

On the first play from scrimmage, Singleton took a handoff from Vino and immediately sensed that his path around left tackle was blocked off. He bounced it to the right, toward the Patriot sideline, and had only green astroturf in front of him. Eighty yards later, he was celebrating in the end zone with his teammates because he had given Sachem North yet another



Sachem North receiver Shane Reilly hauls in a 36-yard touchdown in the second quarter. Photo by Steven Zaitz

finals since winning the Long Island Championship in 2013. Ward Melville was the 2022 county champion.

In a game filled with wild haymakers and explosive plays by

second quarter. Burgos answered again, finishing off a 65-yard drive with a one-yard keeper. The drive was aided by two 4th and short conversions, one of which was a completion to WR Brody

touchdown-sized lead.

After a Patriot three and out, Sachem was on the precipice of expanding their lead to two touchdowns as they drove the ball deep into Ward Melville



Ward Melville's Daniel Brausch Jr. did everything he could for the Patriots on Friday night. Photo by Steven Zaitz

territory. But do-it-all linebacker/running back/emergency kicker Daniel Brausch Jr. made a leaping interception in the end zone for the green and gold with five minutes left in the third quarter to keep it a one-score game.

"I saw the quarterback [Vino] step back, and when he threw the ball, I knew I had a chance to make a play for my team," said Brausch, a senior.

He would make more plays for his team. After his interception, the Patriots would march 80 yards — all on the ground — in seven minutes, and it would be Brausch who would cap the drive with a one-yard plunge, tying the score at 21.

"Being a two-way player is an honor because it means the coaches believe in me enough to put me in those positions," Brausch said. "I look at it as having twice the number of chances to make plays to help us win games."

Brausch would help in even more ways than just those two.

When Morgan, who is the Patriot kicker in addition to playing wide receiver, was injured in the first half of the game, Brausch took over on kickoffs and extra points. He made both of his kicks, and one of his kickoffs was nearly recovered by Ward Melville. He also returned kickoffs on special teams.

With 10 minutes remaining in the game, Ward Melville had forced the Flaming Arrows backward and Vino and company faced 3rd and 12 deep

minutes, and score on a six-yard run by Singleton with a smidgin over two minutes left in the game.

Brausch would block the extra point, which created the possibility of Ward Melville, with two minutes left and three timeouts, winning the game with a last-minute TD and an extra point conversion.

The Patriots moved the ball to midfield in short order. Burgos scrambled to the Sachem 35 with just over a minute remaining. But on 3rd and long, after a long delay caused by timeouts taken by both teams, the shotgun snap of center Bobby Ehlers flew over Burgos' head. The quarterback did well to track it down and throw it away. But it was a waste of a valuable down, and it brought up 4th and 10 and the Patriots' last chance.

Would they get off the mat and survive for yet a fourth time in this game?

Burgos dropped back but didn't find anyone open. He tap-danced down the right sideline, cut back into the middle of the field and lunged forward. Would it be enough?

Despite his effort, the ball was spotted about three quarters of a yard short of the sticks. Sachem ball. The game was over.

"That last drive was tense," said Burgos. "We had a limited amount of time and were trying to do everything as quickly as we could. It was a tough way for the season to end."

in their own end. A stop by the Patriots would likely result in getting the ball with good field position to get the go-ahead and potential winning score.

But in one of the most important and explosive plays of the game, Vino rolled right and hit WR Andrew Eaton for 24 yards and a 1st down. This was a Patriot backbreaker. Sachem would convert three more 3rd downs, consume eight

Patriots boys volleyball peaks at right time to win LI championship

BY BILL LANDON
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

The Ward Melville boys' volleyball team finished the regular season in seventh place in Division I with an 8-6 record, entering postseason play as the No. 5 seed.

The road to the Long Island championship took the Patriots through Sachem North, the No. 4 seed, winning 3-0 Oct. 25 in the quarterfinal match which sent the Patriots to the semifinal round with a road game Oct. 28 against top-seeded Bay Shore. It would take five sets to determine the winner, but the Patriots prevailed with a 3-2 victory to advance to the Suffolk championship game with another road game against No. 2 West Islip Nov. 1. Again, it would

take five sets in the Suffolk title game, but Ward Melville edged the Lions 3-2 to punch their ticket to the Long Island championship game against Syosset at Center Moriches High School Saturday, Nov. 11.

The Patriots have peaked at the right time, sweeping Syosset and winning the Long Island title 25-20, 25-14, 25-22. Outside hitter Kyle Fagan was outstanding with 18 kills and seven digs. Ward Melville will compete for the New York State championship title game at the Albany Capital Center arena Saturday, Nov. 18.

According to New York State Public High School Athletic Association, "This is a digital-ticketed event. Cash sales will not be available on-site. Kids 5 and under are free."



The Ward Melville boys volleyball team celebrates its Long Island championship victory Saturday, Nov. 11. Photo by Bill Landon

Go to tbrnewsmedia.com for more sports photos
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Ward Melville girls soccer wins back-to-back state titles

Congratulations to our Ward Melville girls soccer team for winning its second straight state championship. Story to follow next week.



Photo courtesy Sheila Murray

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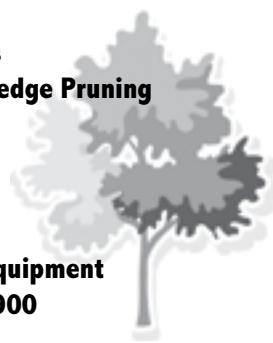
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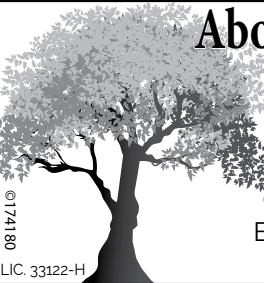


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Editorial

Beyond 'thank you'

Honor veterans by preserving their history

"Thank you for your service."

Especially around Veterans Day, we say and hear these words many times. We express our gratitude and appreciation for American veterans, those who risked it all so that we may enjoy our cherished American freedoms.

The freedom to speak one's mind. The freedom to exercise one's sincere religious convictions. The freedom to peaceably assemble and petition government — and the freedom of the press.

While we often take these freedoms for granted, we must remember that they are not guaranteed. Throughout our national history — from imperial Britain to the Confederate States to the Axis powers to al-Qaida — our enemies have sought to deprive us of our sacred freedoms. They have sought to undermine and wipe away our way of life and our democracy.

Standing in their way time and again have been American service members. To protect and defend our democratic norms and our way of life, veterans risked their lives, many paying the ultimate sacrifice.

Along the North Shore, we live among some of American history's greatest patriots. No matter his or her tour of service, each veteran has a story to share. And crucially, many have carried the banner of service back into civilian life, building up our local communities and making this a better place to live.

We would be deeply troubled by the loss of local and national historical memory. Thankfully, we have history courses built into elementary and middle school curricula. We also enjoy and sincerely appreciate the efforts of local historical societies here preserving our history.

History gives us roots, establishing a sense of who we are and where we came from. To move forward as a community and nation, we must first grasp how we arrived at where we are. Fortunately for us on Long Island, we have a path ahead.

At the former Rocky Point train station, a collection of veterans and local volunteers are building out the Suffolk County World War II and Military History Museum. This regional veterans museum, to be operated by VFW Post 6249, aims to tell the stories of local service members from across Long Island. The museum is slated to launch on Thursday, Dec. 7.

Since learning of this project, our staff has enthusiastically supported its mission. We believe the museum will help foster two of our central goals as a staff: informing locals about their community and inspiring love for this place we call home.

As this year's Veterans Day services wind down, we can all help this museum get off the ground. The museum is actively seeking donations in the form of equipment, uniforms, combat supplies and other artifacts and memorabilia.

We ask our readers to honor a veteran in their own lives by donating. We urge all to help lend a hand — because these stories are too valuable to lose to history.

To donate, contact the museum's curator, Rich Acritelli, by emailing richvack@yahoo.com.

WRITE TO US ... AND KEEP IT LOCAL

We welcome your letters, especially those responding to our local coverage, replying to other letter writers' comments and speaking mainly to local themes. Letters should be no longer than 400 words and may be edited for length, libel, style, good taste and uncivil language. They will also be published on our website. We do not publish anonymous letters. Please include an address and phone number for confirmation. Email letters to: editor1@tbrnewsmedia.com or mail them to **TBR News Media, P.O. Box 707, Setauket, NY 11733**

Letters to the Editor

Clarifying recent events at Sherwood-Jayne Farm

Preservation Long Island would like to clarify the events that took place at the Sherwood-Jayne Farm on Nov. 8.

The entire 12.5-acre farm is private property, as are the grazing sheep and pony. We have made access to the animals and the property available to the public as a community benefit.

Considering that the farm site is not an active animal farm, we came to the realization earlier this year that the aging animals will soon require care beyond what we can provide. The decision was not financially driven — it was in the best interest of the animals.

While Susanna Gatz has undoubtedly been a loving caretaker, she is not the only person capable of caring for the animals. She was first made aware of PLI's plans for the animals and the change in her status as early as April.

We understand how community members will miss the sheep and Snowball — as we will — but we have committed ourselves to finding a solution that will provide animals of an advanced age with the services they will require.

After working within the community and searching for the best possible fit, we found Berkshire Sanctuary Farm, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing aging animals with a serene location and

professional veterinary care.

When Susanna's friends arrived to protest the transfer of the animals to Berkshire on Nov. 8, we did allow children onto our private property to say goodbye to the animals as a courtesy. Unfortunately, the noise and activity of Susanna's adult protesters stressed the animals into a state where Berkshire felt it was not safe to humanely move them during the commotion.

We hope we have not lost the opportunity to provide the animals with a forever home at Berkshire.

Alexandra Parsons Wolfe
Executive Director
Preservation Long Island

Sherwood-Jayne Farm animals should be allowed to stay

Sherwood-Jayne Farm on Old Post Road in East Setauket is a jewel of our community.

Thanks to the actions of people within our community and elsewhere, the farm has remained a lovely and happy place for both adults and children to enjoy just as Mr. Howard Sherwood envisioned long ago.

Unfortunately, the owners of the farm, Preservation Long Island, have decided to remove the animals from the residence, sending the four sheep to Berkshire Farm Sanctuary in Peru, Massachusetts, and Snowball the pony to an undisclosed location on Long Island.

I googled the sanctuary to find out about its purpose. Their mission is "to rescue, rehabilitate and provide a safe haven for abandoned, abused and neglected companion and farm animals and promote humane education and compassion to all beings." This is a beautiful mission, but the animals at Sherwood-Jayne have never been abandoned, abused or neglected. They have been tenderly and compassionately cared for all their lives.

On Wednesday, Nov. 8, the executive director of Preservation Long Island, Alexandra Wolfe, and a security guard arrived at the farm with minimal notice with the intention to promptly remove the animals from the farm. Ms. Wolfe then refused to give information to the current caretaker as to where Snowball would be heading or who would be caring for her.

This action showed medical neglect as there was no exchange of information about the care that Snowball has received to keep her alive and well. Thanks to the uprising of concerned local neighbors, this event was drawn to a halt, and at the end of the skirmish, the animals remained at the farm. None of these actions make sense to me, or to many community members.

The animals should be allowed to live out their remaining days in their happy and safe place at the Sherwood-Jayne Farm.

Bonnie Dunbar
Setauket

Perspective: 'Diet Coke' Democrats not effective?

Over the next few months, voters and pundits alike will dissect and pontificate about how Long Island as a region could be a "red den" when voter registration is relatively even — it was 50/50 in 2020 between Biden and Trump — and given Democratic party victories across other states, including Kentucky.

A familiar chorus making the rounds is saying that Democrats running as "GOP-lite" is not an effective strategy. This theory effectively states that if consumers are given a choice between Coke and Diet Coke, they will invariably choose classic Coke — or the Republican candidate — over the Democratic GOP-lite candidate.

There is some curious credence to that theory as we are entering what I call the "voter silo" era of American politics, where the level of cross-pollination — namely voters spreading their ballot choices among Democrats and Republicans, as well as

voters crossing party lines — is a rare phenomenon. This makes messaging to voters more complicated.

When I ran for Brookhaven Town highway superintendent in 2017 and 2019, I engaged in guerilla marketing, carrying a piece of asphalt around to depict how grave our infrastructure problem was. It was entertaining in every room I entered.

I would canvass neighborhoods, find the worst road and open my statement with "Who took Chaplin Boulevard here?" or any other road in the area. "Well, I brought a piece of it here with me" to a chorus of laughter. I was able to lower the margins in some districts that were 75% red to 60% red, and

in my hometown of Selden, flip districts 70% red to 55% blue.

Guess what? I still lost, both times. Look, my opponent had a ton of money, the Republican and Conservative line, a 12-year political career and the political machine behind him. While the voters we could get our message to were somewhat responsive, it is very hard to get a majority of red voters to cross

over unless you have deep ties to the community you seek to represent in elected office.

The only reason I flipped election districts in Selden and Centereach is because I played on the voters' baseball teams or shoveled their driveways as a kid. Community ties matter.

Long Island as a region

certainly has voters that will never leave the GOP silo no matter how much we hammer them on corruption, cronyism, career political careers or any of the other poll-tested modicums of why America hates politicians. But, as one of my mentors and good friends, Rabia Aziz, has told me over and over, "We have to make political campaigns bottom up from the grassroots instead of top down."

As Democrats, we tend to believe that our ideas will rule the day and that may be true, but at the end of the day, voters want to vote for someone they feel will represent their interests. This starts by identifying the issues that people care about: the disgraced park, the dilapidated shopping center, the broken road, the burnt-out streetlight. That's local politics.

U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato

PERSPECTIVE
CONTINUED ON PAGE A6



By Anthony R. Portesy

Opinion

Living in a world where it couldn't possibly be my fault

We've come a long way from the "my dog ate my homework" days. I mean, come on, let's give our society the credit it's due. We have taken the blame game, the finger pointing and the it-couldn't-be-me-because-butter-wouldn't-melt-in-my-mouth game to an entirely new stratosphere.

Gone are the days of simple, linear and mostly nonsensical excuses.

Let's start in Washington, DC, which is the biggest clown show this side of the Atlantic and where the notion of a democracy gets battle tested nearly every day

Who is responsible for the national debt? That, of course, depends on whom you ask. The democrats point to former President

Trump, while the republicans accuse President Biden and the Democrats.

Maybe those wily politicians are onto something. You see, if no one takes responsibility for anything and we can point fingers at the other side reflexively and without any effort to compromise and work together, we can live without consequence, create our own economics and come up with judgmental and schoolyard bully nicknames for the other side.

Brilliant! Blame someone else convincingly enough and not only do you not have to look in the mirror or come up with solutions, but you can also turn your entire reason for being into defeating the other side or, at the very least, enjoying their losses.

Look, I'm a Yankees fan. I know all about Schadenfreude. The next best thing to a Yankees victory, and it's a close second, is a Red Sox loss.

But I digress. People have turned blaming others into a fine art. In sports, athletes and coaches deploy the modern blame game

to excuse their losses or to step back from accepting responsibility or, perish the thought, to give the other team credit.

Like a zebra in the Serengeti to a hungry lion, referees in their striped uniforms in football games become convenient targets. They took away a victory by calling a game against us. Athletes and coaches can dig their verbal claws and teeth into those officials, who stole what would certainly have been a more favorable outcome.

How about school? It couldn't possibly be the fault of our angelic children, who were busy watching these athletes on TV or on their phones the night before, for doing poorly on a test. It has to be the teacher's fault. If teachers could only inspire their classes, our children would learn and excel.

You know who I like to blame? I like to focus on tall people. Don't get me wrong. Some of my best friends are tall. It's just that, well, have you noticed that tall people get a lot of attention? Some of them are CEOs of big

companies and make enormous salaries. They are also picked first in gym, which gives them the confidence to become successful.

While we're affixing blame, let's also shake our heads at gym class. Sure, it's healthy to run around and have a few moments when we're not listening to teachers who may or may not inspire us, but gym class can bruise egos and create a Darwinian world where height, which is kind of the fault of our parents and their parents and on and on, is an advantage.

Hey, I'm not whining. Okay, well, maybe I am, but it's not me and it's certainly not my fault. I blame society, commentators on TV, coaches, politicians, teachers, my parents, your parents, the parents of the kid who served as a bad role model for my kids, and maybe Adam, Eve and the snake for putting us in this position.

Oh, and you can be sure butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. I have a dairy allergy, which, ironically, is the fault of my dairy farmer grandfather.

What are your likes and dislikes about yourself?

Just for fun during a break, I wandered around the office, asking staffers what they liked best about themselves and what they liked least. I got some interesting answers after assuring them they would not be identified nor fired as a result of their responses.

I would ask you the same question, dear reader.

But first, perhaps you would like to know what some of the others said. These are not direct quotes but are intended to summarize the thoughts.

"I like my ability to analyze a situation, to think it out," said one. "By the same token, I don't like that I tend to overthink issues and questions, like this one. Or my self-criticism"

"I'm pleased that I'm steadfast and see my way through a project or a decision," said another.

"I'm not easily dissuaded or derailed." What wasn't appreciated? "I'm shrinking, losing height as I age."

Here are some more comments, some delivered off the top of their heads; others after some premeditation, were emailed to me.

"Three things I like about myself: My sense of humor; my capacity for compassion and thoughtfulness, although it can be heartbreaking at times; and my ability to see multiple facets of a situation." As far as dislikes: "Although I like being direct, sometimes I can be too direct and it may take people off guard; I don't have much patience; I can't seem to stick with an exercise regimen."

This same person added, "Well it's been an interesting exercise. I have been doing a little experiment of my own with this. I've been asking my friends and family which has led to great conversations. So thank you for that!"

Not having enough patience was often cited as a shortcoming. Other positives were offered with enthusiasm.

"Authenticity!"

"Comfortable in my own skin.!"

"Integrity!!"

"Good listener!"

"A good friend!"

"My curiosity!"

Another staffer referred to a sense of humor twice: "I like my humor—but sometimes it gets me into trouble." This same person "cares about other people."

"I like that I get along well with other people," was shared with me by another. "I am a team player And I always pay my bills on time." On the other hand, "I have a time management problem, and I worry too much. In fact, I worry about worrying too much."

And here is an almost universal one. "I can't stay on a diet!"

So it seems only fair that I tell you my top likes and dislikes. Here goes, dislikes first.

I'm a lifelong procrastinator. 'Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow' was a saying made for me. Now in my defense, I will suggest that there might be some wisdom in that because...sometimes problems and chores

disappear by tomorrow. But most of the time, that's a lame excuse. I'm sure one of the appeals of journalism for me is that it has unyielding deadlines for press time, thus forcing me to get going.

Another personal drawback is my tendency to keeping my desk messy. I know where everything is, but no one else does. Then I have to go through extended bouts of straightening the many papers. A third is my inability to resist a nosh, especially if it is something sweet.

As to my likes, I, too, value my sense of humor, which has enabled me to endure the incongruities of life. Also I am intrigued by and deeply interested in others' lives, which I guess is a help in interviewing. And lastly, I am grateful for my appreciation of the natural beauty in the world. Snow-covered mountains, a slow moving river under umbrellas of green trees, the waves in the harbor rhythmically caressing the shore, the light on the underbellies of the clouds after a rain, the bluejays casing my deck for next year's nesting, the bright yellow forsythia after a brown and grey winter, all bring joy to my soul.



Between you and me
BY LEAH S. DUNAIEF

TIMES BEACON RECORD NEWS MEDIA

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What a class act

Your staff was wonderful this evening. Everyone loved the food as well. Let's talk about getting you on our preferred caterers list for future events. Cheers, Lisha

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