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Doing their good deed



PHOTO SUBMITTED

The West Valley Cub Scouts Pack 615 participated in their adopt a highway project on Sept. 28 on behalf of CH2M Hill B&W West Valley in appreciation for sponsoring their pack.

Higgins' local focus offers fuel for Weppner

Weppner bases fight on wider perspective

By **Jerry Zremski** | News Washington Bureau Chief | @JerryZremski |
on October 26, 2014 - 5:32 PM, updated October 27, 2014 at 6:45 AM



Democrat Brian Higgins is seeking a sixth term in Congress representing the 26th district; GOP challenger Kathy Weppner has a fiscal message.

The race for Congress in New York's 26th District pits a Democrat who thinks Buffalo is rising against a Republican who thinks the sky is falling.

For proof, witness the contrast between two scenes that played out last week.

Looking out over Canalside from the plaza outside downtown Buffalo's new Courtyard by Marriott on Friday, with the new HarborCenter rising to his left and his brownish hair flying every which way in the breeze, Rep. Brian Higgins talked a bit like a proud father.

"It's campaign season, so I'll say it: We had something to do with this," said Higgins, a Buffalo Democrat whose strong-arming of the New York Power Authority provided the funds to begin the city's waterfront boom.

But a day earlier at the Lake Effect Diner in University Heights, Higgins' opponent laid two immaculately manicured hands, with 10 long hot-pink fingernails, out across a pile of paper that foretold doom of one kind or another, and spoke like a very worried mother.

Describing her interactions with voters on the campaign trail, Republican candidate Kathy Weppner said: "I hand them my card and say: 'I'm running for Congress – can we talk about our debt?' Or: 'I think we're going to lose our country.' And I have to tell you, the response back is: 'It's already gone.' Or: 'You think?' Or: 'What are you going to do about it? You're one person.'"

There you have it: two very different politicians, spelling out two very different visions that provide voters in the 26th District with a stark choice.

Higgins, 55, pledges to keep doing what he has been doing for [his five terms in the House](#): focusing on bringing home the bacon that's helping to grease Buffalo's renaissance. He says a long-suffering region such as Western New York needs a member of Congress who puts local economic development first, not a tea party Republican like Weppner.

"It seems to me that she's a person with some pretty extreme views," Higgins said. "And sending extreme members to Congress only perpetuates the dysfunction."

Yet Weppner, 53, a former WBEN talk-show firebrand known as “Kathy from Williamsville,” says a member of Congress should be paying attention to global matters as well as new buildings at the waterfront. She frets about the federal debt and the collapse of the dollar, and the threat from the Islamic State group, or ISIS, and illegal immigrants crossing our borders, and “Obamacare,” and Common Core, and you name it, and accuses Higgins of ignoring all the trouble. “Brian was elected to be the national problem person in Washington, the person who has to be thinking about our country as well as our constituents, because his constituents live in the country,” she said. “I think there’s been a lot of neglect with the national issues.”

Higgins represents a heavily Democratic district in a region where a Buffalo News poll last year found him to be the region’s most popular politician by far, with an almost unheard-of favorable rating of 77 percent in the City of Buffalo. He won a closely fought first race for Congress in 2004, but he quickly began piling up points with voters a year later, when he won a commitment from the state Power Authority to start spending upward of \$279 million of its future profits on local economic development, with a focus on the Buffalo waterfront.

Through Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp., that money helped launch Canalside, which was just the start of a development boom between lower Main Street and the Inner Harbor. And beyond that, with Higgins’ help, \$120 million in additional federal funding has been used on other local waterfront projects, ranging from the Buffalo River cleanup to a new parkway along Ohio Street to a series of pocket parks at the Outer Harbor.

Higgins didn’t stop there, either. He also has been a key player in the development of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, helping secure \$30.5 million in federal tax credits for Roswell Park Cancer Institute’s new Clinical Sciences Center, as well as a \$19 million federal grant for the cancer center.

And when he’s not fighting to bring more money to Buffalo, it seems he’s fighting to prevent Uncle Sam from taking something away, be it the U.S. Postal Service’s William Street processing center or local Army Corps of Engineers operations or the Williamsville Social Security office.

Asked about his hyperlocal focus, Higgins said: “For the member of Congress from Buffalo and Western New York, the position is different. Rather than becoming another voice in the wilderness of dysfunction in Washington, what Buffalo needs is a vision, and a demonstrated ability to do the hard work that’s necessary to get a lot of things done.” But his Buffalo-first mindset comes at a price. While Higgins has won passage of legislation naming Buffalo’s new federal courthouse and boosting funding for the **West Valley Demonstration Project**, no major legislation bears his name, and his voice is rarely heard in major national debates.

Those facts are central to Weppner’s argument that she should replace Higgins in Congress. Most notably, she accuses Higgins – a member of the House Foreign Affairs and Homeland Security committees – of entirely missing the threat posed by ISIS until the Muslim extremist group captured a large swath of Iraq and Syria and started beheading Americans.

“Brian Higgins’ silence is unacceptable in the face of genocide,” said Weppner, who noted in the interview that Higgins had been briefed on the matter by military and terrorism experts for two years but didn’t speak up. “We cannot afford to have a congressman who refuses to recognize threats to America.”

Despite the depth of her concern that the ISIS extremists have said that “they’re not going to stop until their flag flies over our White House,” Weppner said her main motivation in running for Congress is the burgeoning federal debt and the threat it poses.

She points to a book called “The Death of Money: The Coming Collapse of the International Monetary System” by economist James G. Rickards, which predicts that America’s big-borrowing ways will lead to the collapse of the dollar and an unprecedented economic catastrophe.

Can it all be prevented? Weppner doesn’t think so.

“I think its too late,” she said. “I think we have spent too much money. The economy’s not going to come back with ‘Obamacare’ in place because businesses are not going to hire. They’re not going to take the risk.”

Weppner made a living, of sorts, off such statements for nearly nine years, as “Kathy from Williamsville,” warning Saturday afternoon listeners of the threats posed by Muslims and illegal immigrants and a president whom she thought might not have been born in the United States.

Weppner has filled her website with policy papers and has moderated her rhetoric. Of her past errors on the airwaves, she says: “If I said something, it usually meant I had a piece of paper in front of me from a decent source that I was quoting. ... But I was on the radio for almost nine years. You can’t spend nine years on the radio and not ever say something that is regrettable.”

But there’s one thing Weppner doesn’t regret: her repeated questioning of whether President Obama was born in the United States.

Nonpartisan fact-checkers such as PolitiFact dismissed that question out of hand years ago, but Weppner said last week: “I think that was a very legitimate conversation to have.”

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WVDP makes donation to area food pantries

Posted: Friday, November 14, 2014 6:00 pm

By Rich Place, Managing Editor

WVDP Food Drive

Volunteers from the West Valley Demonstration Project gathered with Parkview officials in front of Parkview supermarket and two trucks with donations that went out to nine area food pantries.



Press photo by Rich Place

In the spirit of the holiday season, employees from the West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) again volunteered their time and energy Friday to deliver food to nine area food pantries for the upcoming winter season.

The WVDP Food Drive fundraising effort, including food donations from employees themselves, was responsible for the donation of nearly 125,000 pounds of food to area pantries, according to volunteer coordinator Lettie Chilson.

More than a dozen volunteers from WVDP gathered at Parkview in Salamanca on Friday ready to hit the road and hand deliver the food to pantries in Cattaraugus and Southern Erie counties.

“This is their Friday off and they are volunteering their time to do the delivery,” Chilson said. “We do it because they are our neighbors around the site. What better way to do a community outreach than to know where your help is going.”

The drive partnered with Parkview for donations and the purchase of many of the food items. The group also partnered with Springville Wal-Mart to help in donating more than 380 turkeys. The food on Friday was delivered to two food pantries in Springville and also pantries in Ellicottville, Franklinville, Delevan, West Valley, Little Valley, Cattaraugus and Dayton. The drive has been conducted annually and Chilson said the goal each year is to provide pantries with the food prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. The donation aids the pantries not only at Thanksgiving but also as it heads into the cold winter months.

“We try to get the inventory they need for winter,” she said. “We give them holiday items plus some staples that they need.”

Chilson said despite the economy improving each year, food pantries continue to see increases in need. This is due in part to last year’s frigid winter and the increased cost in electric and propane bills, she said.

The WVDP has been conducting the food drive annual since 1989 and has collected more than 1 million pounds of food, according to drive organizers.

(This story appears in the Nov. 20, 2014 edition of The Salamanca Press.)



West Valley demo project to begin moving HLW casks

Friday November 14, 2014 | By: Colleen Mahoney | News

WEST VALLEY— The Ashford town board heard an update on the status of the West Valley Demonstration Project at their Nov. 12 meeting. West Valley site management director, Paul Bembia told the board the Project is working to remove the high-level waste canisters out of the main plant process building, beginning in March of next year.

Bembia said the plan is to move 16 storage casks to the new storage pad in 2015, 20 will be moved in 2016 and the remaining 20 to be moved in 2017. After that, the main plant process building will begin to come down in 2018-19.

“There has been a lot of important work going on in preparation for all of this, but you haven’t seen most of it because it has generally been occurring inside the buildings,” Bembia said. “Beginning next year, you are going to start seeing the high-level waste storage casks being moved to the storage pad, and that is a really important milestone for preparing to bring the buildings down.”

Bembia also informed the board that the Department of Energy is working with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to get final authorization to transport the high-level waste melter and two vitrification vessels offsite for disposal.

“Those are the three large, white, square shipping packages that have been stored on the south plateau near the railroad tracks,” Bembia explained. “DOE would like to make that shipment happen next year, as well, and that would be another important milestone for the project.”

The board also heard an update on the plan for the comprehensive master plan, which was drafted in 1964, but never finalized. Planning board chairperson Andrea Mellon said the board is looking at the plan from a demographics viewpoint, in regard to what it will look like down the road.

Mellon said the first step is to send out a questionnaire to town residents to see what they would like to see in the plan, then hold a public meeting. The planning board will be working with other towns that have recently finished their comprehensive master plan.

“Instead of reinventing the wheel, we’d like to take advantage of those who have done it,” she said.

The board of trustees approved the distribution of the questionnaire, which the planning board hopes to send out in early 2015.

In other board matters:

- The board approved the Town of Ashford New York lost dog Facebook page as an official page of the town.
- The board approved town clerk Patricia Dashnaw to research the cost and savings of purchasing a postage machine.

The next board meeting for the town of Ashford will be Dec. 10, at 7:30 p.m. in the Ashford Community Center, located at 9377 Route 240, in West Valley.

WVDP collects record amount in annual food drive

Tuesday December 2, 2014 | By: Colleen Mahoney |



Food pantry volunteers accept donations from a WVDP employee.



West Valley Demonstration Project employees volunteered to help distribute more than 125,000 pounds of food collected during their 2014 Food Drive.



The Ellicottville Food Pantry was one of 1 of the recipients of donated food from the West Valley Demonstration Project's 2014 Food Drive.

WEST VALLEY— In its 25th year, the West Valley Demonstration Project's annual food drive collected more than 125,000 pounds of food, including almost 400 turkeys, to be delivered to nine area food pantries.

The deliveries were made on Nov. 14, to ensure families that rely on local food pantries had enough food to enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving meal.

"We do it because they are our neighbors around the site. What better way to do community outreach than to know where your help is going," said Lettie Chilson, CH2M HILL B&W West Valley, LLC project engineer.

Chilson, who has been a food drive organizer for the past 10 years, helped partner the WVDP team with Springville Wal-Mart and ParkView Supermarket in Salamanca to maximize donations and help ensure the pantries end up with food that serves their highest need.

Employees were encouraged to donate cash, which can be used to purchase non-perishable food items and turkeys at discounted wholesale prices, which helps to maximize the amount of food it donates each year.

In the 25 years the West Valley Demonstration Project has hosted a food drive, they have donated more than 1.5 million pounds of food to area food banks and pantries.

According to a statement from the West Valley Demonstration Project, nearly every one of the 350 WVDP employees from CH2M HILL B&W, U.S. Department of Energy, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and subcontractor personnel donated to the annual Food Drive. In addition to those that donated, 25 employees volunteered to help distribute boxes of food and turkeys.

Food pantries in Springville, West Valley, Ellicottville, Franklinville, Delevan, Little Valley, Cattaraugus and Dayton benefited from the WVDP food drive.

"The need in our local communities is humbling," Chilson said. "We are all thankful that we can help our neighbors in some small way."

Rep. Reed hopeful for growth in 2015

Posted: Tuesday, December 30, 2014 7:30 pm

Rep. Reed hopeful for growth in 2015 By Christopher Michel, Olean Times Herald | 0 comments

Taking stock of 2014 as it comes to a close, U.S. Rep. Tom Reed, R-Corning, believes New York's 23rd congressional district is poised for economic growth in the new year.

During his weekly telephone conference with the media, the congressman pointed to several developments in the last year that bode well for his 11-county congressional district.

are a positive indication that we're going in that direction," Rep. Reed said. "We have control over our energy supply, and that's reflected in our prices at the gas pump. I will encourage things at the national level to continue that, like comprehensive tax reform that could lead to millions of jobs being created."

During the next year, Rep. Reed said his work in the nation's capital will center around reviving the district's "stagnant economy."

"I'm very excited by the advanced manufacturing bill and the possibilities it has to really grow and create the jobs of tomorrow," Rep. Reed said.

The congressman was referring to the Revitalize American Manufacturing Initiative.

The legislation would establish regional Centers for Manufacturing Innovation to focus on the next generation of manufacturing technologies.

"There's possibilities for the Western New York and the Southern Tier to have one of those hubs in our own backyard," he said. "That's at the top of our list to try to identify opportunities for manufacturing."

For Cattaraugus County, the congressman intends to focus his efforts on two projects that have spanned decades.

"One of the things I'm hopeful that we can put together next year is the completion of Route 219 with Continental 1," he said. "I spoke with Catharine Young, the state senator, and we had a great conversation about really identifying how we can get Continental 1 together."

The Route 219 project carries an estimated \$1 billion price tag and would increase the expressway from two lanes to four from its Peters Road exit outside of Springville to Interstate 86. It's part of Continental 1 effort, which aims to have a four-lane trade route from Toronto to Florida.

Rep. Reed also plans to support legislation for the West Valley Demonstration Project and its continued cleanup of a former nuclear fuel reprocessing plant.

"That would improve national security and take care of the nuclear waste there," he said.

Rep. Reed offered a mixed appraisal of actions taken by Gov. Andrew Cuomo recently impacting economic development in the state's entertainment and energy sectors.

The congressman applauded the governor's push for state casino gaming authorities consider an application to allow for a Las Vegas-style gaming facility in Tioga, a small community between Corning and Binghamton.

"I think it's only fair that the Southern Tier be placed into consideration as one of the four choices for a casino," Rep. Reed said. "There's a strong application from Tioga Downs. I'm very hopeful that the license will be summarily granted to that operation and we can move forward with that facility's construction and development. Fundamentally, it's a question of jobs and how people are going to be able to afford to live in the Southern Tier.

The congressman tempered his remarks on future casino development in his district.

"By no means do I believe casino gambling is a cure-all for the economic woes of the Southern Tier," Rep. Reed said. "But it is an opportunity for jobs that can be put in place in order to hopefully keep and spur economic development and keep the region going in the right direction."

Rep. Reed criticized the governor, however, for the upcoming ban on fracturing for oil and gas extraction — referred to commonly as hydrofracking — in New York.

"We're going to continue to deal with the issue of the ban," Rep Reed said. "One of the things that we're going to do is take a hard look at is promoting legislation at the federal and state level to recognize that (Gov. Cuomo) has taken property rights from landowners unilaterally. In my humble opinion, we need to stand for the landowners who pay property tax bills and compensate them for the right that has been taken with this decision. I think it's only fair and the right thing to do."

(Contact City Editor Christopher Michel at cmichel@oleantimesherald.com. Follow him on Twitter, @OTHChris)

Ashford board not certain new bridge is the way to go

January 16, 2015

By Colleen Mahoney

ASHFORD— West Valley Central School graduate Brad Frank will join the ranks of the West Valley Demonstration Project, announced Paul Bembia, site manager and director. The announcement came during the Jan. 14 Ashford Town Board meeting when the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority representative gave his update.

Frank will fill the program manager position, which has been open since July 2014. A West Point Military Academy and St. Bonaventure University alumnus, Frank previously worked at CHPWD as a supervisor of decontaminating and Kinder Morgan, as an operations supervisor, Frank also served as a captain of the U.S. Army. He started working at the West Valley Demonstration Project as of Jan. 15.

Town Supervisor Chris Gerwitz is sending a four-year projected budget to Senator Catharine Young, at her request, including past hardships of the town.

The supervisor also read a letter that was sent to residents who will be inside the boundaries of the proposed municipal water district, which encouraged all residents to be present for a Jan. 21 public meeting.

The board opened bids from eight companies, for the work on Fox Valley Road, which ranged in price from \$171,700 to \$49,406. The bids will be reviewed and awarded in February to ensure work can be completed by June.

Board member John Pfeffer expressed his displeasure with replacing the bridge over Cattaraugus Creek, connecting Erie and Cattaraugus counties. Stating that the only reason the bridge was being replaced was because “enough people donated to [Congressmen] Chris Collins,” and an exit and entrance ramp should have been built on both sides of the creek on U.S. Route 219, which would render the former 219 bridge obsolete.

Board members agreed to send a letter to the Department of Transportation to better understand what is happening with the replacement bridge, and if adding entrance and exit ramps was looked at.

“No one will take the time to look at the cost of adding an exit or entrance ramp because they just want to build a bridge,” echoed member Charles Davis.

“I get Springville’s point, they will suffer,” said Pfeffer of the absence of a bridge. “But I can’t tolerate this waste of my money, of everyone’s money.”

Member Beverly Hess agreed, saying that Ashford is “on the other side of this,” and deserves to know what is happening.

The board reminded the public that there will be a public forum on Jan. 20, at 6:30 p.m. at West Valley Central School, to discuss a sports merger. The next board meeting for Ashford will be Feb. 11 at 7:30 p.m.



The Ashford Town Board, from left Patty Dashnaw, Chris Gerwitz, John Pfeffer, Beverly Hess, Bill Heim and Charlie Davis.