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Concerned Citizens regroups to take on environmental issues

By KATE DAY SAGER, Olean Times Herald
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Nick O'Keefe (at right), the new president of Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County, speaks to members who gathered for a reorganization meeting Thursday at Perkins Restaurant in Olean.
Kate Day Sager/Olean Times Herald

OLEAN — A reorganizational meeting for the Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County group not only elected a new president and officers Thursday, but began identifying environmental concerns in the region.

At the start of the meeting at Perkins Restaurant in Olean, longtime board member and vice president Barry Miller said the environmental organization had suffered a minor setback when former president Kathy Boser stepped down from the post. Miller said he was pleased with the turnout of more than a dozen current members who want the environmental and health watchdog organization to continue its support of issues in both New York state and Pennsylvania.

The organization counts its successful fight to keep a solid waste landfill from locating in Farmersville, as well as a wind turbine farm from setting up in Allegany, among its accomplishments since the early 1990s.

One of the first orders of business at the meeting was the election of the new board president, Nick O’Keefe, a current resident of Allegany County. O’Keefe, a Michigan native, has been an activist for political and environmental issues, works in fundraising for HomeCare & Hospice in Cattaraugus County and plans to move to the county. O’Keefe said he has worked with Concerned Citizens of Allegany County on issues that include fracking and landfill issues.

“I’ve always had a soft spot in my heart for the little guy,” O’Keefe said.

Elected as the new vice president to replace Miller was Rob Mrowka, a retired U.S. Forest Service supervisor and forest ecologist, who was not present.

Miller said he expects the group will be ready to tackle several local environmental issues in upcoming months.

Miller identified the proposed Epiphany Allegheny fracking wastewater treatment facility in Coudersport, Pa., as one such issue. He said the Seneca Nation of Indians has asked the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to reject permit applications for the produced water discharge plant, as it will be located at the headwaters of the Allegheny in Eulalia Township in Potter County.

“It’s going to be putting (harmful) particles in the Allegheny River” which runs through Olean and Allegany, he said.

Miller asked members of Concerned Citizens to attend the upcoming Coudersport Area Municipal Authority which will discuss the proposed treatment plant. The meeting is slated to be held at 6:30 p.m. Monday at the Sewer Plant on Toles Hollow Road. He said a group of Seneca Nation officials also plan to take a busload of people to the Coudersport meeting to voice their concerns.

Another issue on Concerned Citizens’ agenda is the ongoing West Valley Demonstration Project, a nuclear waste remediation site in West Valley. The site has focused on the cleanup and containment of radioactive waste from a commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing plant abandoned in 1980.

“There are many opportunities coming up in the next month in West Valley so we’re going to try to get carloads of people to go up there,” Miller continued. “This is a big decision about what to do about West Valley — dig it up or let it stay there and erode into Lake Erie.