



Town of Franklin

April 2002 Newsletter

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April 2002

Town of Franklin

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TOWN OFFICIALS

Town Supervisor

Mary Ellen Keith

Deputy Supervisor

Gene Goff

Town Councilmen

Janet Goff

Timothy Goff

Walter Kretser

Town Justice

Roger Symonds

Highway Superintendent

Donald Vorrath

Deputy Highway Supt.

Michael Canty

Town Clerk/Tax Collector

Lauren LeFebvre

Attorney for the Town

Edward Murphy

Assessor

Douglas Tichenor

483-0188

Code Enforcement Officer

Edward Lagree

891-5976

TOWN BOARD MEETINGS

Regular town board meetings are held the second Monday of each month. The meetings begin at 6:30 p.m. and are open to the public. The next regular meeting will be held Monday, May 13, 2002.

The town board will hold a public workshop on Monday, April 29, 2002, at 6:30 p.m. at the town hall.

Check the town Web site for further details on upcoming meetings. ❖

Camp for Troubled Teens in Onchiota?

Residents of Onchiota and Town of Franklin officers were invited to Paul Smith's new library on April 11 for an "informal communications meeting" regarding plans in the works for an outdoor wilderness program on 640 acres on Roakdale Road next to the Fadden Indian Museum. The property is owned by Paul Smith's College, who will rent it to the Aspen Education Group. The invitations came from Curt Stiles, Vice President of Institutional Advancement at Paul Smith's College.

Dr. George Miller, president of Paul Smith's College, greeted guests as they arrived. The meeting began as Stiles introduced Jim Glaesser, program director, Leah Vandekieft, administrative director, and Hansel Halverson, program director for physical site. Also on hand to answer ques-

tions was Cindy Garso of North Woods Engineering in Saranac Lake, who is working with the Aspen Education Group on site development.

Aspen Established in 1981

In addition to wilderness workshops, the Aspen Education Group runs residential and community programs for troubled youth. The first program started in 1981, and they now run 43 programs in eight states. Students come from all over the country. Most of the programs are located out west, and they looked for several years to find a northeastern location. They found Onchiota to be an ideal for their needs.

The wilderness program will serve an age group of 14 to 18. The kids are referred to the program by their parents or by their counselors. Most

have problems with family, are not doing well in school, and have low self-esteem or other personal problems. While this is not a treatment program, it is an intervention program for kids who may have begun to experiment with using alcohol and drugs.

Each group consists of six to eight kids with three or four staff. Their wilderness experience includes hiking and camping, ropes-course experience, and other outdoors challenges, all of which focus on a positive and therapeutic experience to foster self growth in the kids. Most of the time is spent out in the wilderness. The kids have no free time.

When asked if there is a problem with runaways,

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Town Loses Betty Little in Redistricting

Residents of the Town of Franklin most likely will be losing Elizabeth O'B. Little as their representative in the New York State Assembly. In the new plan, the town is set to fall into Assemblyman Chris Ortloff's district.

According to Little's office, the decision is not final, but barring a lawsuit or unexpected circumstance, it is expected that the New York State Assembly-Senate redistricting

task force's new boundaries will be passed. The spokeswoman said, "Legislator Little will represent the Town of Franklin until January. In this fall's election, however, she will run in her new district."

"I'm very disappointed to lose her," Mary Ellen Keith, Franklin Town Supervisor, said. "She has been very good to us.

Frank Karl, who was town

supervisor before Keith said, "I was very lucky to work with Betty Little. She was very responsive to our problems. Either she or her office always returned calls and followed up whenever we needed her."

"I look forward to working with Chris Ortloff," Keith said. "I don't know him well yet, but I'm sure he will do a fine job of representing us." ❖



Committee and Community Notes

Recreation Committee by Janet Goff

The Recreation Committee reported to the town board that they have several new members. Derrick Romeo, Dave Dekkers, Alan Oliver, Robin Oliver, and Norma Longo have joined Janet Goff and Tim Goff in making up the committee. At their March meeting, the committee agreed that getting fencing installed around the basketball court would be a goal for 2002. Tim Goff is getting quotes from fencing companies. Janet Goff reported that the committee was approached by a local businessman who wants to help out with the purchase of a scoreboard for the park. He would like to remain anonymous at this time.

The committee's next meeting will be April 20, at 1:00 p.m. at the Town Hall. If you have any questions or ideas for the Recreation Committee don't hesitate to contact them. They want your help in making Kate Mountain Park the best it can be, and hope to see you at the next meeting!

Senior Citizens

Roland LaPierre reported for the 55+ Club that with the April time change they now meet in the evenings instead of in the afternoons. Meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. every second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at the Town of Franklin Town Hall.

The group will be leaving for a casino visit on April 30. Seniors will be given sign-up priority, but LaPierre says that there usually is extra space and adults of any age are invited – and encouraged – to come along. The trip is free, and everyone will be given \$10 to use at the casino and have a free lunch. For more information, call Margaret Turnbull at 891-2656.

The seniors are always ready to welcome new members. Benefits include pot luck dinners, guests who speak on topics of concern to seniors, bingo, and taking part in trips and excursions. Mostly it's about getting out, enjoying being with other people, relaxing, and having a good time.

Haley Merrill braved puddles and snow and mud to gather eggs to add to her basket.



Celebration Committee

The Celebration Committee sponsored a children's egg hunt on Saturday, March 30. Lauren LeFebvre, Kathy Fadden, Janet Goff, and Mary Ellen Keith put together a party that was a lot of fun for all the kids and their parents. Approximately 20 kids attended. In addition to the egg hunt, there were plenty of snacks and games and lots of prizes. The Golden Egg prize was won by Veronica LeFebvre, and the Silver Egg prize was won by Hannah Parker.

The committee reminds everyone that they are planning a Family Day for July 4. Plans are for bands, old-fashioned games, and lots of activities for all ages. It will be held at Kate Mt. Park.



Chad Ordway paused to show Mom his collection.

Eagle Scouts

Mary Ellen Keith reported that Clayton Smalley's Eagle Scout project is proceeding. He has contacted Gabriel's Camp Adirondack to make 18 signs. The town also has been approached by another scout, Bryon Tuthill, who would like to do some work with the town cemeteries for his Eagle Scout project. He will attend the board meeting in May with more information. ❖

Board Workshop Meetings Productive

In addition to the monthly regular board meetings, the Franklin Town Board has been meeting monthly for workshop sessions. The public is invited to these sessions, which are held the fourth Monday each month at 6:30 p.m. The workshops often involve going out into the community so the board can get first-hand information.

In April, the workshop moved to the town garage. Don Vorrath, Highway Superintendent, gave the board a thorough tour of the facility so they could see for themselves what work is needed to upgrade the aging facility. The board

also was given the rundown on the town equipment, from the 30-ton tandems to hand tools to repair them. The board members saw first hand the toll taken on the highway plows from a winter of keeping the roads clear, and the work necessary to keep the equipment in working condition.

The next workshop meeting will be held April 29. The meeting will begin with a trip to the Goldsmith/Rt. 3 property that has been offered for sale to the state. The state requires permission from the town board before they can pursue accepting the offer. In question is

whether or not it is in the best interest of the town for the property to be turned over to the state, or if there is other developmental potential for the property that would enhance the tax base.

The meeting will reconvene at the town hall. The agenda includes final discussion on the town procurement policy, which is ready to be adopted.

Workshops are an excellent time for town residents to express their views to the board on town business. The board encourages you to share your thoughts as they consider decisions on your behalf for the town. ❖

Your Assessment Too High? Grieve to the Town BAR!

By Jean Baltzly

Maybe you've received a notice that your property assessment has been raised. Or maybe you've just feel that your property is assessed for more than it is worth. Believe it or not, there are people in the town who want to hear from you, and who may be able to do something about it.

First you will want to contact the assessor. Check with him to make sure that his descriptive information on your property is accurate. Learn how he determined the assessment. It is likely that you will be able to work out an agreement and the dispute can be resolved.

However, if you can't agree on an assessment, grieve. This involves presenting a complaint to the Town of Franklin Board of Assessment Review. This board has the authority to review your claim and consider lowering your assessment. New and reappointed members are required to attend training by a representative from the New York State Board of Real Property Services, and most of them attend these meetings every year.

Step I—The Grievance Form

To grieve your assessment, you must complete and sign a grievance form. Your grievance would fall into either Excessive Assessment or Unlawful Assessment. The other two categories, Unequal Assessment and Misclassification, are not grounds in the Town of Franklin because the town's state Equalization Rate is 100%, and the town does not have "approved assessing units".

Remember: The presumption is that the assessor is correct, so you must prove that he is wrong. The board can consider only evidence you provide. Also, they can lower your assessment only as far as to what you have indicated on the form what you feel it should be (or what exemption you feel you are eligible for).

It is your responsibility to provide the back-up for your claim. You will need to provide information, such as a detailed list of comparable properties with unequal assessment (including tax lot, assessed value, similarities, etc.); a recent appraisal by a certified appraiser; con-

tract of sale or other evidence showing recent purchase price; or evidence that the property could not be sold for the assessed amount.

Presenting Your Complaint

The grievance hearings are open to the public, and minutes are taken of the proceedings. Before you present your claim, you will be asked to give an oath that the information you present is correct. Although it is not required, the BAR recommends that you appear at the hearing. It's helpful for your claim to be there to answer any further questions they may have.

If you can't attend the grievance hearing, you may have someone represent you. Be sure you have completed the form and that it is signed by you. You also can mail in your complaint

or leave it at the town hall. Any complaints mailed to or left with the assessor will be turned over to the BAR. Note that the form and back-up information must be received by the BAR on or before Grievance Day.

The decision on your claim will not be made at the hearing. You will be notified by mail of the board's decision within 21 days after Grievance Day.

If you do not agree with the BAR's decision, you have yet another opportunity to appeal your assessment through Small Claims Assessment Review within 30 days after July 1 when the final assessment roll is filed. You can contact the assessor or the town clerk for information on small claims. ❖

Here is some information that may be helpful to you if you plan to grieve your assessment.

- ✓The Assessor for the Town of Franklin is Doug Tichenor. He is available by calling him at 483-0188, or by leaving a message at the town hall.
- ✓Grievance Day for the Town of Franklin is held the first Wednesday in June. This year the date will be Wednesday, June 5, 2002.
- ✓There is no cost to file a complaint. Forms are available at the Franklin Town Hall, or one can be mailed to you. You may also want to ask for a copy of a publication from the New York State Board of Real Property called "A Taxpayer's Guide: How to File a Complaint on Your Assessment".
- ✓The Town of Franklin Board of Assessment Review members are appointed to five-year terms by the town board. They are Jean Baltzly, Katrine Kretser, Sandra Oliver, and Mildred Vorrath.
- ✓The information you will need for the grievance form is on your tax bill, or on the tax roll which is filed May 1 each year, or, if you had an increase in your assessment, on the notice you received from the assessor. The town clerk also can help you.
- ✓On May 1, the assessment roll for the upcoming year is filed with the town clerk, complete with assessment changes. The final roll is filed July 1.
- ✓Valuation Date is January 1. The value of your property must be determined as of this date. Taxable Status Date is March 1. The status of the condition and ownership of your property is determined as of this date. ❖

Board resolution passed for Freedom of Information

The board passed a resolution to implement the Freedom of Information Law in the Town of Franklin at the April 8, 2002, regular town board meeting.

Town Attorney Edward Murphy explained that the town clerk will be appointed as Records Access Officer. The records will be available for inspection at the town hall Tuesdays, Wednesday, and Thursdays from 9:00 to 2:00 p.m.

There is no charge for inspection of records, or for the officer's search time, or to certify that copies of documents are true copies. However, there

will be a 25-cents per page charge for any copyies up to 9 x 14 inches, and actual cost for any document larger than that.

A public notice regarding FOIL will be posted.

Murphy pointed out that the town is not required to create a document if a document does not already exist, or to create one that would be an aggregate of several documents.

Should a request for materials be denied by the records access officer, an appeal can be made to the town supervisor. ❖

Adirondack Airport Update Presented to Board

Town of Harrietstown Supervisor Larry Miller and Lake Clear's Adirondack Airport Manager Don Bourdon presented to the board the improvements and procurements at the airport, and long-term plans for upgrading and expanding the facilities.

Under discussion was the town's contract with the airport that includes funding of \$1,851 from the town. Miller and Bourdon discussed the value of the airport to the region, from bringing in tourists, to Lifeflight, to jobs for residents. They answered many questions from the board regarding service, the need of work being done, and the expansion plans.

The board also voiced their feeling that the only time they heard from

them was to ask for money. Miller reported that while that was so in the past, he and Bourdon feel that they need to be open to the opinions of the local towns and that they do need to keep everyone updated.

Miller suggested that the board have a representative attend their public meetings, which are held the first Tuesday of every month. Ron Keough and Barry DeFuria from Saranac Lake are on their board to represent local towns. Miller and Bourdon also promised to meet with the town regularly to keep them updated.

The board agreed to sign the contract pending some corrections and changes to the contract to be made. ❖

Town of Franklin Web Site Full of Information

According to Town Clerk Lauren LeFebvre town's Web site update and expansion is completed. The work was done by Rainbow Graphics.

The Web site is full of information, and current information is updated bi-weekly. There is a calendar of events; listing of town businesses; recreational activities; town history; pictures; maps; rentals and real estate; town forms that can be downloaded, including forms from the clerk and building permits. Town board meeting agendas and minutes are on line, and town officials, with phone numbers and e-mail are

listed. Town newsletters also are on line.

There is a guest book where viewers are encouraged to leave messages. LeFebvre is asking for any suggestions so the Web page will keep evolving to be as useful and informative for residents and visitors as possible.

LeFebvre and her husband, Jeff, are breaking new ground: not many small towns have Web sites. It's a powerful communication tool, and they plan to make full use of it for the benefit of all of us. ❖

Not agreeing with it, but . . .

Understanding the Tax Process

by Frank Karl

Recent events in a neighboring town (updating of assessed values) and plans for the Town of Franklin's assessment update give rise to the need for people to understand the overall tax process. Drastic increases in assessed values soon after a total re-evaluation would cause many questions, two of which could be, "Are they trying to tax waterfront owners out of their homes?" and, "What was the quality of the work done in the re-val process that an update would warrant such drastic increases?" Barring substantial improvements in one's property, what could cause this?

Well, within the Adirondack Park, as available waterfront and other properties diminish, this gives rise to higher prices being obtained for what little is available. Should that cause existing properties, not the market, not improvements, to have drastic increases in assessed value? Because of the current Equalization Process, that does happen. Is it far? Not to those who do not sell and have no intention to.

Overheard: The town and/or the county wanted more money, so they raised our assessment. Reality: Your town and county budgets determine how much money they get.

An increase in assessed value does not necessarily mean an increase in the amount of your taxes. Your tax amount is determined by two values: your assessed value and your town and county tax rate. It all starts with your town and county budget. Contrary to what many believe, an increase in assessed value or the tax rate does not by itself give the town or county more money. As stated, the amount of money they receive is determined by their respective budgets. That being said, the first step in controlling the amount of taxes you pay is to attend the budget workshops and the public hearings on the budget and have a voice in the amount of the budget.

Once the budget is adopted, the total monies of the budget divided into the total assessed value for the town and county determines the tax rate per \$1000 of assessed value. This tax rate multiplied by your as-

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Understanding Taxes . . .

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essed value is what you pay.

So, the other step in controlling your taxes is to go through the grievance process to be sure that your property is assessed reasonably when compared to similar properties in the town and county. Your assessor explained this process in a previous newsletter.

As stated earlier, if your assessment goes up, it does not mean that the town or county gets more money, but what it does mean is that you pay a greater amount of the money they do get as compared to other taxpayers.

Said another way, within a given town they could update the assessed values and double the total assessed value of the town. If the budget remained the same, the tax rate would be half of what it was and the taxes you pay and they receive would remain the same. If everyone's assessed values went up or down by the same amount, there would be no increase or decrease in their respective tax bills. However, the experience is that some go up and some go down by varying degrees, so our taxes do change.

Confusing? To attempt to control the amount of taxes you have to pay, you must be involved in two processes:

First: Use the tax rolls determine whether or not your assessment is comparable to other properties in the town and county. If not, grieve in the proper manner.

Second: Attend the budget workshops (listen and not participate) and the public hearing on the budget in which you can participate. The final budget does not get adopted until after the public hearing and your questions and concerns are heard by the town board and the county legislature for their respective budgets.

The New York State Division of Equalization and Assessment, not the assessor for your town or county, govern the equalization process. ❖

Help Wanted:

Supervisor Keith is looking for someone with a green thumb to volunteer to help take care of the flower garden in front of the town hall.

If you enjoy gardening and can help out with the planting, weeding, and watering, call Mary Ellen, 891-1916. ❖

CE-LE-BRATE GOOD TIMES, COME ON!

by Lauren LeFebvre

Ok, maybe you don't remember when Kool and the Gang were in the Top 10, but I do. That was almost the Anthem of the 80's. Maybe that's what drew me to become a member of the Town of Franklin Celebration Committee. Think about it, what a great thing to volunteer to do — "CELEBRATE".

The committee consists of Councilwoman Janet Goff, Kathy Fadden, Miriam Lawrence, Norma Longo, Mary Ellen Keith, and me, Lauren LeFebvre (you remember me, the Evil Tax Collector). Now, if that's not your stereotypical party group I don't know what is.

We meet when we can and normally not all at the same time. One of us usually mentions an idea to another member, the second member adds their ideas to it and mentions it to another member and so on and so on. By the time it reaches the last person it's so chaotic we have to call a real meeting!

No, not really! As a committee we've have one party so far. The Easter Egg Hunt and Party you may have heard tell about. It was very successful in that kids came, played games, ate snacks, hunted eggs and no one went home crying. That's also a benchmark of a successful Town Board meeting!

The next Celebration we are in the process of getting off the ground is a Family Fourth of July Celebration. Our plans are sketchy, I told you how we network with each other, so you shouldn't be shocked with the sketchiness thing. Here's what we have so far:

1. It will be on July 4, 2002
2. It will be a late afternoon event (3:00 p.m. or so)
3. It will be Potluck
4. We will play family games, three-legged race, potato sack, watermelon seed spitting, pie eating
5. Maybe a "throw a cream pie at the person of your choice" booth. This would definitely be a fund-raising booth for the Celebration Committee. Any residents, including elected officials, are free game. I think the pie thrower would have to let us know in advance who they wanted the pie-throwee to be so all parties would be present. If it was a really popular request we could auction the throw off to the highest bidder. (Hey, I'm just coming up with these ideas as I'm typing this. I'm dead serious about this booth, by the way.)

Now here's where we need help: We would really like to organize a Town of Franklin band! More than one if there are enough musicians who would like to play different types of music. We were thinking of having instruments set up all afternoon so bands won't have to set up and tear down. I'd really like to see this happen. Think about it — it's all just for fun. No one needs to be nervous, scared, or embarrassed. Heck, I'll probably have had to go somewhere and hose cream pie off myself 50 times before the day is through! Mary Ellen Keith's 2 cents in this "music thing" is to have a Town of Franklin choir and/or sing along. She's hoping her old school chums will pull together for her. (I mean "old" in the best possible way — I can feel myself ducking pies already.) Feel free to give any one of us your 2 cents about what you'd like to see included in the day's events.

This sounds so fun! The committee decided on a late afternoon event so people would have time to get in to Saranac Lake for the fireworks, but I'd rather stay in the Town of Franklin with my neighbors and friends and CE-LE-BRATE GOOD TIMES, COME ON! ❖

In Remembrance of Curtis Tyler

Whereas Curtis Tyler was a life-long resident and active young man in our community of Vermontville, New York,

Whereas despite his physical disabilities from childhood through manhood, did work and volunteer his experience and endurance thereby enhancing the Town of Franklin endeavors and its people; "Curt" will be well remembered as the "Booster to Baseball" for coaching youngsters in sports and manually working to develop Kate Mt. Recreation Park; his endurance, dreams, plans, and humor will be forever instilled in the values of the youngsters as they "play ball" in life.

We the people of his hometown in the Town of Franklin do therefore extend our condolences to Curt's family upon their loss of a father, son, brother, and uncle. God bless you! Joan, you have been a wonderful mom!

Respectfully submitted by
Town of Franklin Town Board
April 8, 2002

Onchiota Wilderness Camp for Troubled Teens

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Glaesser responded, "The staff stay with the kids 24 hours a day, and several measures are taken to monitor them at all times. At night we even take their pants and shoes, and then do a check to make sure they haven't hidden them down in their sleeping bags." They also have six to ten back-up personnel on call at all times and emergency procedures that include immediate notification of local law enforcement. They have already arranged with the Department of Environmental Conservation that the local ranger will have weekly updated itineraries.

"It is not a military-style experience," according to Glaesser. "We do not allow adjudicated (court ordered) kids, kids with a history of running away, setting fires, suicide, or violence. In addition to their applications, the kids are checked out by interviewing their families, teachers, and counselors. They are kids with problems, but because our first priority is the safety of the kids and the staff, the kids are carefully chosen."

Glaesser, who has been with Aspen for eight years, spent the last several years setting up a program in North Carolina similar to what is planned for Onchiota.

The program runs year-round. Glaesser anticipates that the first full year of operation will serve approximately 200 kids. At any one time there will be a maximum of 32 to 40 kids on

the property. Sessions will run from 28 to 37 days. The cost to parents is \$390 per day, and it is all private pay.

Local Economic Impact

To run the program, they anticipate they will hire up to 60 people, including field people, office staff, and a crisis response team. In North Carolina, ten of the hired staff is local. Initially office space will be rented from Paul Smith's College, but they eventually will have to find a space elsewhere.

When asked about the plans for development on the site, Cindy Garso of North Woods Engineering explained, "We will probably build up to eight 1,000 square foot cabins. The lodges will be rustic – there are no plans for electricity or running water. Bathrooms will be outhouses." Garso said that seclusion is an important part of the program and that none of the facilities or activities will be visible from the road. For that reason as well, the program will have little impact on the day-to-day life of Onchiota residents.

When asked if the program will be implemented whether or not the residents want it, Garso replied, "We've already met with the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Department of Health, and the Adirondack Park Agency, but the Town of Franklin has no zoning, and therefore no planning board, so there wasn't anyone to apply to." Their only requirement in the town is the building permit process. Their planned use of the land is consistent with APA

restrictions.

Dr. Miller responded to the question why residents were only now learning about the program. Until now, the Aspen Education Group and college representatives were focused on determining if it is feasible to run the program on this property. Meanwhile, Miller researched Aspen Education Group. He spoke with sheriff departments, town councils, chambers of commerce, and neighbors of Aspen's other sites.

"We wanted to make sure neighbors of all these programs felt good about them. Universally, what I have here is that these are good people and good neighbors." There have been no exceptional difficulties. "I spoke with sheriff officials in similar remote areas about their experience with emergency response issues. Also, we were checking (Aspen's) professional credentials to find out what kind of reputation they have in the industry. They are considered the best."

Next Meeting in Town of Franklin

At the end of the meeting they supplied brochures, pamphlets, and videos with more information. Lauren LeFebvre will have the materials at the town hall for anyone who wants to see them. Aspen representatives agreed to meet with the board and residents at a workshop to be held at the Franklin Town Hall in Vermontville on Monday, May 27, at 6:30 p.m. Information also is available on their Web site, www.aspeneducation.com. ❖