

April 6, 2009

They said it couldn't be stopped, but in June of 2005 when I heard the thunderous roar from the packed house at Floral Terrace I knew, at the very launching of the third track, the tide had already turned and I think the officials from the MTA/LIRR who presided over the meeting, knew it also.

The scene inside the old movie theatre that unforgettable evening crackled with the pathos and drama of a classic Frank Capra picture. It was spirited, emotional and heart-stoppingly courageous. In one quintessential moment of time, the question of who owns the future was unflinchingly answered by an entire generation. It was a triumph of the human spirit and what was once said in a much larger context, could now be said, in its own way, about the gigantic resistance that cannonaded across our little village in outright defiance of the MTA Leviathan -- If Floral Park lasts a thousand years, residents will look back and say that this was their finest hour.

It's nothing less than a small miracle to see a common concern majestically uplifted into a common responsibility. But our village, confident in its own powers, inspired confidence in others. Friendships were forged, alliances created and Floral Park, like an enormous magnetic field, seemed to draw everything toward it. Soon elected representatives of every stripe were snared by its pull and following the trail we blazed.

Lasting legacies were born out of the crucible of battle, the most noteworthy being the cost-sharing agreement we spearheaded that was signed by all the villages along the mainline corridor agreeing to collaboratively finance the legal efforts to oppose the third track. When those who cast and molded this instrument into a fighting faith have left the scene, when memories fade and the lights, one by one, are turned out, we can sleep peacefully knowing this document will remain a living monument of our joint resolve and determination.

The future, it is truly averred, is not ours to see, but I'm deeply encouraged by information I've received from the highest levels. While no project is forever dead and no process, no matter how vulgar, is beyond resuscitation, I am confident that the dreaded third track has been indefinitely postponed. Absent a willingness to fight for our homes, our families and our way of life, our village would have fallen victim to a fate not of our own making, scourged and scandalized by the so-called forces of progress. I congratulate my village on a battle spiritedly waged and honorably concluded.

Over these past 4 years, Floral Park was blessed with a Board of Trustees who is committed, dedicated and unafraid to challenge the very winds. Independent of the mayor, they stand on their own, carving out reputations beyond the boundaries of our village as leaders and noble public servants. With their inestimable help, we have had a significant impact on the size and massing of homes within our community, changed FAA regulations to allow pilots to fly east of the village, lobbied successfully for a cap on the number of aircraft arriving and departing from Kennedy and compelled the

Eastern Regional Helicopter Council to open a new route over the waters of the North Shore.

Under the auspices of the Village Board, bridges of cooperation were built to our large and historic neighbor to the west, Belmont Park, emergency snow removal agreements were quietly forged and as unwavering goodwill ambassadors of the community, our voices echoed in the ears of the influential and powerful stretching north to Albany and south to the nation's capitol. The cratered landscape of Magnolia Avenue was reconstructed into the Mona Lisa of roads and the need for effective financial management, in a wounded and bleeding economy, was not skirted, but met with bold and steadfast measures, looking always to take the long rather than the expedient view.

In short, guided by the wisdom of those who came before, tempered by the fire of tribulation and fortified by the timeworn belief that "right makes might", we did what we were elected to do, govern.

The blur of events over these past 4 years was dizzying, but crystal-clear are the memories of a yearlong Centennial celebration that must be marked as the most extraordinary thing to have happened to our village since its creation. From the brilliant colors of fireworks bursting upon the canvass of a darkened winter sky on New Year's Day to the solemnity of the ecumenical service in November and all the myriad events in between, this participant can only express his profound thanks to his community for the high honor and great privilege of serving as your mayor during our momentous Centennial Year.

I make but one other accounting and that is from the moment I was sworn in I sought, in your service, to give "that unforgiving minute, 60 seconds worth, of distance run." In all things I did the best I knew how and whatever attributes I might have lacked to advance the cause of our village it was only because, try as I might, I could not put in what God had decided to leave out.

My official service is now winding down as I've decided to observe the long, almost unbroken tradition of serving two terms and then move on but not away from the village that has nurtured and sustained me. The arrow of time points ever forward; our yesterdays cannot be our tomorrows for everything is fleeting and nothing abides. The innocence of childhood fades, our youth melts like morning dew, our children mature with lives of their own and, in the final passage, when the shadows lengthen, we surrender the miracle of life itself. It is for us then to drink in deeply the gift of each day, play our part, and wonder, at the very wonder of it all.

With the race run, I now, as I must, take leave of this column. I do so, for sure, with a touch of sadness, but mostly gratitude as I confer to you, all of you, my constituents, my colleagues, my critics, my staff, my friends, my muses and to you, my dear readers, from my very depths, an affectionate and heartfelt farewell.