

April 8, 2016

Last Wednesday night's announcement gave rise to a new day and warm smiles. It was true; the planned VLT Casino at Belmont Park was not to be. Late negotiating by Jack Martins ended that possibility as OTB packs its bags and heads to Aqueduct. Negotiating continues between Nassau County, and OTB over revenue and process. Much has yet to be revealed about the terms of the settlement, but clearly what this Village and its residents have proposed from the beginning proved true: a VLT Slot Machine Casino should not be located at Belmont Park or anywhere in Nassau County. We expressed that in 2013 when we voted NO to the Casino Amendment. Today, that vote and our voice resonate throughout Nassau County. Congratulations!

My deepest gratitude to all the residents of this great Village for staying the course and staying informed. Try as they might, our voice and reasoned argument could not be dismissed. The efforts of so many cannot be ignored, and I would like to recognize some: first to my colleague, Deputy Mayor Kevin Fitzgerald. Kevin is a true leader and served as Chairman of the Belmont Task Force. He led a committee of some of the most talented, giving, intelligent, caring and amazing individuals I have ever met: Enthusiastically shared insights & ideas, raised funds, created/purchased signs, car magnets, created a website informing the public of our reasoned argument against this ill-conceived idea, raised awareness, spoke with the media, our neighboring villages, our community, the clergy, PTA's - the effort was phenomenal.

Two weeks after OTB's announcement, the Belmont Task Force swiftly organized an amazing rally of over 2000 people which captured the front page of Newsday! That rally stunned OTB and our critics. Ridicule was silenced. Our resolve was firm. Our Village Administrator Gerry Bambrick worked 12 hour days, 6-7 days a week for months. His work was without equal, his research and strategizing with the law firm of Beveridge and Diamond or speaking time and again with decision makers in Albany had the chilling effect on OTB's future. The Floral Park-Bellerose Trustees: Laura Ferrone, Doug Vigo, Denise DellaCorte, Dave Fowler and Jennell Horan were everywhere and tireless contributors and workers. The Grassroots Movement on Facebook and other social media sites led by Matt Sexton and Nadia Ortiz had a daily impact. Their march and rally in January was very successful, again capturing the media's attention. The support of Congresswoman Kathleen Rice, Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages and Nassau County Legislator Carrie Solages was immediate and never waned.

I have always believed that Belmont Park is a source of history, identity and pride shared between the hamlet of Elmont and Floral Park rather than just a space that divides us. One of the wonderful outcomes of this fight has been the friendships formed and allegiances strengthened with our neighbors in Elmont. An important renewal, as together, as the hosting communities of Belmont Park, we look forward to the development and the future of that jewel - Belmont Park.