

December 2008

Centennial Year: Final Thoughts

Giving a retrospective tour d' horizon of this momentous year is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say from the opening fireworks on January 1 to the closing prayers of the ecumenical service on November 16, the year was rich in the language of celebration. It was a milestone long anticipated and having sojourned through its days and nights it now has become a signal achievement of our past.

What we will carry with us moving forward are the sentiments it awakened and invigorated, a revival sure to be long remembered and cherished. We praise the Centennial for its spiritedness and its subtlety, its pageantry and its common touch, its reverence for our past and its faith in our future.

On reflection, it was a year-long event elegant and evocative, moving and sublime, filled with meaning and gratification. No community, after all, can prosper over a span of 100 years and more without a sense of kinship and a purpose widely held and deeply shared. These shared values have not only sown success for our village but are the seeds of its future fulfillment.

The logistics of putting on events of this magnitude are enormous and, at times, overwhelming so we were fortunate to have former Mayor Tom Hayden, Ginny Appel and Susan Walsh to shepherd us through the swirls and eddies to bring us safely to shore. I also want take this opportunity to thank the Centennial Committee consisting of Deputy Mayor Kevin Greene and Trustee Mary-Grace Tomecki, former Mayors Steve Corbett and Ann Corbett, Bill Bedell, Clare Byrne, Bill Corbett, Mary Corbett, Walter Gosden, Jim Green, John Lockwood, Sandy Munz, Gary Pipa, Cindy Sanz, Alexa Ventimiglia and Terry Whalen. We acknowledge, posthumously, Richard Biggin with love and gratitude. Additional thanks to the many volunteers serving on sub-committees, and most importantly, the entire community without whose participation this Centennial celebration would not have been possible.

Development of Belmont Race Track

With the announcement by Governor Paterson that the Empire State Development Corporation and the New York State Wagering Board will oversee the development of Belmont Race Track, an ambitious deadline of December 31 has been set for the completion of this plan.

Deputy Mayor Greene, Trustee Jim Rhatigan and myself attended two presentations at the Elmont Public Library where an outdoor mall was proposed for the 22-acre parcel on the south side of Hempstead Turnpike and on the 8-acre parcel on the north side, and upscale hotel. In addition, comments were solicited in prioritizing the needs and desires

of the community.

While Floral Park favors the revitalization of Belmont and the redevelopment of the Elmont community we also seek assurance that the safety and security of our village will not be compromised. Moreover, to shoulder the burdens of development a revenue stream must be created to help offset additional expenses such as fire, police and medical response costs as well as to address the surrounding infrastructure that has contributed to serious drainage issues in our village.

Regarding Video Lottery Terminals (slot machines), our position is well known and shared by some of our Elmont neighbors who have expressed concerns about the negative influences legalized gambling brings to the community and society as a whole. This being said, we recognize that prospective developers may look for VLTs before committing to this project.

At the presentation we were assured that all input would be taken into consideration as the plan is presented to the Governor for further action. Meanwhile, we will continue to follow this subject closely and provide input to ensure that the interest of the Floral Park community is met.

Local Laws

During meetings held in November, the Village Board of Trustees adopted three local laws. Local Law 8 of 2008 amended the relevant sections of the Village Code so as to increase the maximum income levels for those 65 and older by \$1,000.00 for purposes of being eligible for a tax exemption.

This increase in income eligibility levels was authorized under the Real Property Tax Law by the New York Legislature and is designed to afford relief to our senior residents.

In another tax related enactment, the Village Board adopted Local Law 9 of 2008, entitled "Tax Exemptions for Cold War Veterans." Once again, pursuant to authority recently granted by the Legislature, the village has "opted in" to real property tax exemptions for residents who served in active duty between September 2, 1945 and December 26, 1991. Known as the "Cold War" exemption period this enactment recognizes those who served during the Post World War II era.

Finally, the Village Board adopted Local Law 10 of 2008, which allows those operating gasoline service stations within the village to apply for a special use permit to have self-service gas dispensing pumps. Primarily due to safety concerns from gas spillage, the Village Code has prohibited self-service gas-dispensing pumps. Such concerns, however, have not shown to be realistic. On the other hand, the lack of self-service dispensing pumps has increased the cost of purchasing gasoline, putting those who operate stations within our village at a competitive disadvantage.

Applying for this special use permit requires a public hearing before the village board for permission to operate a self-service station and that any self-service gas dispensing

pumps be installed in compliance with all fire suppression, health and safety laws, rules and regulations. Also, all stations must continue to offer full-service by an attendant of premises for the disabled during all hours of operations at the same price as self-service gasoline.

Third Track: A Floral Park Iliad

A brief update: Recently the LIRR and MTA have shelved plans to proceed with the construction of a Third Track (a fifth track in Floral Park) in the immediate future. When and if this project is resurrected remains to be seen although speculation portends that it will again be placed in motion. Drowning in red ink and denuded by scandal, the MTA's heated rhetoric to build a third track has cooled. Their despotism, however, has been checked not checkmated and while we can, in the deadened hush, be lulled into complacency the village board is not unmindful of the lines of John Dryden: A horrid stillness first invades the ear/And in that silence we the tempest fear.

So, be assured we are in communication with our elected representatives, legal counsel and our sister villages along the mainline corridor and we are, poised at a moment's notice, to fire all cylinders and bring the issue to a boil. Any notion by the MTA/LIRR that the air has gone out of our balloon will prove to be wishful thinking.

Four Village Studio

One of the great resources of our village is Four Village Studio (4VS) located in village hall. Since its inception in 1998, the studio has made itself part of the tapestry of our village showcasing community oriented programs as well as taping and chronicling landmark events such as our Centennial year.

4VS has garnered 30 awards, in a wide variety of categories since first entering competition. These awards acknowledge and underscore the studio's efforts and results. The deeply appreciated but uncelebrated Operations Manager James Green has been there from the beginning. His spirit and personality infuses the high professionalism that has distinguished 4VS elevating it to one of the most respected local facilities in the Northeast region.

While Jim Green rightfully acknowledges all the dedicated volunteers at 4VS that share equally in their success the fact is every successful operation must be top down driven. Jim Green has skillfully and tirelessly steered the ship from the helm. He is truly a jewel in the firmament of Floral Park and we are deeply indebted to him for all his efforts.

Some of 4VS recent awards bestowed by the Alliance for Community Media, Northeast Regional Video Festival include:

First place for an episode of "The Floral Park Mayor's Forum" discussing the MTA/LIRR proposed addition of a third track.

First place for Centennial Gardens “The Walking Tour.”

Second place for “Wes Houston Presents” Finn’s Fury, a traditional Irish band.

Second place for the “Floral Park Centennial Fireworks Display.”

Let me extend to all in this season of light and joy a Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and a blessed New Year.