

February 4, 2009

Floral Park & Belmont Day

There is a lot of talk these days about open borders. Well, we have them right here. Turreted and crenellated castle walls do not surround Floral Park, nor should they. We must reach out as others reach out to us. Four Village Studios is one highway of municipal cooperation another is NYCOM (New York Conference of Mayors) that provides us with a forum to share information and discuss common issues and concerns.

It is our object to profitably engage the world and channel our resources into something more inclusive and contributory. Just as tributaries feeding into the mouth of a headstream make for a mightier river, so it is with our strengths and capabilities when nourished in a reservoir of cooperation and concerted action.

This idea of collaboration is the plumage that feathers our relationship with Belmont Race Track. With an expanse stretching some 440 luxuriant acres, Belmont has been our neighbor for the entire life of the village. We have forged agreements with them on emergency management, snow removal and Belmont Stakes Day. NYRA's (New York Racing Association) new desire to promote their facility by exposing local residents to its many attributes affords the village another opportunity to establish bonds that could prove an indispensable support for future operation and contingencies that emerge between us.

Discussions are now ongoing between the Village and NYRA to establish a Floral Park Day at Belmont this June. Also included in the talks are Chamber of Commerce members, service and youth organizations. Some events under consideration are sporting competitions such as basketball, relay races and a 5-K and 2-K run. Children's activities such as pony rides, dress up characters, face painting and crafts are also being planned. Food associated with a picnic atmosphere will most likely be served at the marquee tent in the outer picnic area.

Ideally, we would like to see some of those community-based activities that have been so successful at Saratoga tried over here. Such an event, I truly believe, holds great promise for a fun-filled and successful day. I will keep you informed as things develop.

Our Village & Our Churches

One of my treasured possessions is a Bible presented to me by the "Calvary Full Gospel Fellowship" Church on the occasion of our Village's Centennial year with an inscription thanking me for my continued support of our churches. It's rests on the mayor's desk to remind me of my obligation to promote every influence, secular and religious, that will have a beneficial and conducive impact in shaping the morals and attitudes of our community.

In this light, on January 25 I attended the opening liturgy to celebrate Catholic Schools Week at Our Lady of Victory Parish Church and later that same afternoon a “Week of Prayer” service sponsored by the Ecumenical Council of Churches and hosted by Pastor Gainus Sikes of The United Methodist Church of Floral Park. I was especially moved by the sermon of Reverend John Cole of United Methodist Church in Valley Stream who gave an old - fashioned stem-winder on the need for unity under God.

Reverend Cole noted in the gathering that included both clergy and governmental personages that while the Founding Fathers kept God out of the Constitution they spoke about Him all of the time. My own experience with the literature of the period could not endorse Reverend Cole’s perspective more strongly. Gordon Wood, the most prominent scholar of the Revolutionary era, wrote that one simply couldn’t underestimate how religious language saturated the culture.

Secularists have it wrong when they claim that the founders wanted no religion in the public square. To the contrary, they saw it as a positive moral force providing that government didn’t endorse one religion over another letting each individual conscience freely decide for itself. The First Amendment was fashioned not to protect the irreligious from the religious but to keep the national government from establishing an official religion. Which is why James Madison, the subtlest of political theorists, thought that religion and government will exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together.

This maxim does not, and should not preclude our churches from expressing in the public square their conscientious scruples on the great questions of human conduct and behavior because they are religiously based. Some have pilloried this notion. The famed sociologist C. Wright Mill scathingly wrote that nothing is more ludicrous than the idea of two legged little mortals running around the earth defending an all powerful, all knowing Deity who they maintain is the Creator of the Universe from two legged little unbelievers.

That is no doubt true, nothing is more overdone than untempered exuberance but frankly it misses the point entirely. We should welcome the religious influence not because of any good it does for God, but for the abundance of good it does for us. In a free, self-governing society our choices are nearly unlimited and our priorities so often directed toward self-importance that no matter how astute our sensibilities, or conscientious our upbringing, an agent that gives us not only perspective in the eternal scheme of things but rapturously transports us to the strengths, if not joys of self-denial, governing our being lawfully and the ideals of living the Golden Rule in our daily lives could only have a beneficial and salutary effect on the world we live in, no matter where we may live in it.

In his Farewell Address George Washington, had it exactly right: “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of a peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

Washington continued that the “mere politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect and cherish these supports.” Well this mere politician, while mindful and respectful of the liberty of conscience of the religious and irreligious alike, sees it as glad tidings that in this village of flowers, the flower of faith blooms in every season.

Congratulations to our Devoted Servants

To three who have served our Village both long and faithfully allow me on behalf of a community of 16,000 residents extend our best wishes and fondest hopes for a happy and prosperous future:

Neil Feldman: 35 years, Department of Sanitation
Edward Rothenberg: 31 years, Rescue Company, Floral Park F.D.
Mary Ann Pugliesi: 18 years, Floral Park Library