

January 2009

Utility Company Road Openings

In Ecclesiastics, it is written everything has a season. Such notions are, however, apparently foreign to the cognoscenti at National Grid who, with unthinking presumption, began digging with the ferocity of an irascible pit terrier madly burrowing for its prized bone, in this case old or defective gas mains.

Unhappily, the unearthing of our macadam surfaces did not start until early December, in the midst of the holiday season, when the surly, wintry weather settled brusquely upon the brow of the village. This has resulted in not an insignificant number of their excavations to sink and disintegrate, leaving the village, or portions of it, in a deplorable mess.

Let's backtrack. Every year the Department of Public Works sends notification to National Grid, Verizon and the Water Authority of Western Nassau a list of potential streets for asphalt resurfacing throughout the village. This is to find out if the utility companies have any plans for underground construction work such as gas or water main replacements and to avoid the prospect of digging up newly paved streets. This policy has worked well in the past, but its success depends on everyone playing nice with each other.

In responding to our request, National Grid indicated that they wanted or needed to upgrade many of their gas mains under village streets that they had targeted on their list. In early October, National Grid started applying for street opening permits at the Department of Public Works to replace these gas mains.

These permits were approved and issued by the Village's Department of Public Works. But as stated previously, National Grid did not start most of their work until early December, a delay that has pockmarked our streets causing them at times, to resemble the lunar landscape. Moreover, to add insult to injury, when the cavities were finally filled they were crowned with asphalt patchwork so callously done that they not only looked indecorous but also could be easily mutilated by patrolling snowplows.

Accordingly, we initiated a round robin of phone calls followed by a litany of letters and faxes urging National Grid to meet their responsibilities and do a permanent restoration of our roadways and sidewalks, which they have so rudely and in such untimely fashion, disturbed. Picking the seasonally inclement month of December to start excavations was like playing Russian roulette with the village and we got the chamber with the slug in it. We were determined to make it clear that National Grid does not have diplomatic immunity for shoddy workmanship, that our village is not a floating craps game whose fate can be decided by a roll of the dice, nor will we allow the face of the village to be defaced as if it were the Portrait of Dorian Gray.

This initial discharge of protest by the village, however, was merely a throat clearing for an aria of remonstrance over National Grid's procrastination and poor performance. At my direction, National Grid has been notified in writing that they will not be issued anymore road opening permits until their current permits have been satisfied. The Village Code is very specific

about road and sidewalk excavations and National Grid is definitely not adhering to those specifications.

We have learned that National Grid often subcontracts this work out, sometimes leading to a haphazard product. While we try to politely cooperate with all parties, we will not be chastened by disregard or rebuked with indifference. Our demeanor can change, as others have learned, to an “all trespassers will be prosecuted” mentality if the situation demands it. Some of these miscellaneous contractors did not exactly graduate summa cum laude from “Mrs. Denning’s Finishing School” so you have to be prepared to muscle up and walk the walk and talk the talk just to be seen and heard.

And that is exactly what we have done. A no-nonsense meeting was held on Friday, January 9, 2009 with a representative from National Grid and the Department of Public Works to inspect the areas of concern and to get a commitment for permanent repairs to village roads and sidewalks. The senior gas supervisor of National Grid inspected the areas and assured us of a timely response. While we are not yet ready to fire off every round in our ammunition belt, we have, nevertheless, put National Grid on notice of the liability issues that they have created around the village and our expectations that they be resolved with dispatch and finality.

Congratulations to our Eagle Scouts

It was with great pleasure that I, in concert with members of the Village Board, attended an Eagle Scout Award Ceremony on the 3rd day of January 2009. It was a great privilege to be with the Boy Scouts of America, an organization that stands for the verities of courage, honor, loyalty and patriotism. In the gray, dreary world of what is supposed to be modern living, there has been a weakening. If not the disappearance of the virtues that are readily and steadfastly championed by the Boy Scouts. These scouts are not only serving as a repository of these beliefs but they are a philosophy in action. In their world deeds are measured even more deeply than the words that embroider its treasured ideals.

It may be axiomatic, but it is no less true that if you raise a youngster with certain values, when he is old he will not depart from them. Habits create the attitudes that form character and give birth to destiny. The Boy Scouts have long understood that the mechanics of character formation cannot be achieved unobtrusively but must be hammered and forged through the crucible of the trials and challenges of human existence.

The two most recent recipients are richly deserving of Scouting’s highest honor. Brian Isoldi has been an exemplary member of Boy Scout Troop 482 and for his Eagle Scout project he organized and worked with fellow scouts at Tanglewood Preserve to rid a 1,600 square foot area of an invasive Japanese knotweed, a virulent species that is difficult to remove and must be handled carefully to avoid contamination. Brian subsequently planted the area with donated bushes and trees transplanted from congested areas of the preserve to keep the area free of invasive weeds and preserved with foliage native to Long Island.

It was, I felt a noteworthy project in that it teaches the timeless lesson that it is successes rather than failures that have causes. Ten years ago, our own Centennial Gardens was an unsightly recharge basin. No one actually caused this condition, but once neglected, it deteriorated rapidly. That it is now a garden spot of the village is because of the love and

dedication of those who were willing to invest the effort and time to give that acreage a spectacular facelift.

The same is true with other aspects of the human condition. Poverty does not have causes except mostly in its inaction or inactivity either individually or by the culture itself; it is rather, prosperity that has causes that are rooted in hard work, discipline and an orientation toward the future. Brian, by his own efforts and hard work, has learned that individuals can and do make a real difference in one's own life and in the life of the community.

Andrew Cotsalas is also a member of Troop 482 and his Eagle Scout project was to interview many brave veterans of World War II residing in Floral Park and surrounding communities, transcribing their stories, obtaining photographs and to preserve these stories in the form of a book presented to each of the veterans, Floral Park Memorial High School and the Floral Park Public Library.

A powerful idea for sure and one, I hope that will bear fruit to nourish young minds and hearts. It's been said that the problem with the younger generation is that they have not read the minutes of the last meeting. Now, because of Andrew's labor, they can.

But there is something more than just a compelling narrative. The unflinching voices that speak from those pages are ordinary individuals who did extraordinary things in helping to win the greatest war in history. Compiling stories of heroes has roots stretching back to the days of antiquity and still has the power to give resonance to our own time. Plutarch's Lives, for example, was written with the belief that by reading about noble lives we ennoble our own. It is true.

The historian Stephen Ambrose, who authored "Band of Brothers", wrote of his conviction that in the end it was Boy Scouts of America that defeated Hitler's youth. The veracity of that observation is, I think, unimpeachable, for it was the qualities of courage, faith, loyalty and love of country, the very canon of the Scout's creed that ultimately overcame the horrible arithmetic of the war to change the course of human history.

Next year the Boy Scouts of America will celebrate their Centennial. As we congratulate Brian and Andrew for their achievement, let us honor and strengthen this great American institution by defending and supporting the scouts, its activities and its devoted leadership.

Kudos to Floral Park Fire Department

The Floral Park Fire Department recorded a record number of calls during 2008. The men and women of the department answered an unprecedented 1,500 calls for medical assistance and responded to 345 firematic calls for a total of 1,845 calls. I want to commend the Chief of the Department, Frank Wakely, Jr., and his Assistant Chiefs who answered all fire and rescue calls.

I would also like to publicly acknowledge and salute the actions of Ex-Chief Hugo Berta, who for the second successive year, responded to over 1,000 calls for assistance.