

March 30, 2009

Award Night

On Thursday, March 26th, a cross-section of generations gathered at Village Hall to be formally recognized by the Board of Trustees for feats and deeds performed sometimes over decades and leaving legacies that will endure over lifetimes to come.

Our first presentation was the Spirit Award, recently resurrected, to Mary and Steve Corbett. A tireless advocate for the cause of education, Mary has been actively involved in our schools for many years. Past presidents of the Floral Park Bellerose School PTA, Mary has dedicated herself to enriching the lives and minds of our children. She is the past president of the Sewanhaka Central Council of PTA's, which is the largest PTA Council in New York State. In recognition of her service, Mary received the PTA Life Membership Award.

Always committed to enhancing and improving our village, I appointed Mary to the 2008 Centennial Committee. Her past experience and organization skills made her a natural to chair the Centennial craft fair, which was a highly successful fundraiser whose proceeds were used to help finance the costs of centennial events.

How fortunate that some 35 years ago Mary married her co-recipient for this award, Steve Corbett, a dynamic leader who has made an indelible mark on our community. In the 1980s, Steve was one of the prominent voices and moving forces in the CARE organization that was successful in bringing the children of Floral Park back from Alva T. Stanforth to attend our local schools. During those critical years, he founded the Floral Park Youth Council and was a founding member of the Floral Park Historical Society. Clear-sighted people soon recognized him as a young man with a future and Steve was soon tapped to be a candidate for the office of Village Trustee.

Ascending to mayor in 1995, Steve brought his prodigious energy to bear on what he called "Project 2000" to meet the challenges of the 21st century. During his eventful tenure, he oversaw the renovations to the police department and fire headquarters at Village Hall, lighting and a multi-purpose court was added to our Recreation Center to allow hockey and nighttime league play as well as new tennis and basketball courts. As mayor, he served as the President of the Nassau County Officials Association and instituted Four Village Studio, a community access television studio that was built on the second floor of Village Hall. The studio has garnered numerous awards for their programs.

Unquestionable, Steve's most conspicuous accomplishment was the creation of the Centennial Gardens and Bird Sanctuary. In 1999, an agreement was executed with Nassau County to develop the deteriorating storm basin into beautiful gardens. Over these nearly 13 sprawling acres, nature was permitted to run riot as a wilderness of

overgrowth inundated an unbroken, unsubdued and unconquered landscape. To transform this into a garden paradise was nearly a superhuman undertaking, in other words, a job perfectly suited for Steve Corbett.

Comprising a group of dedicated volunteers, Steve formed the Floral Park Conservation Society whose grassroots efforts have made Steve's vision a beatific reality. Adorned with garden spots and architectural embellishments, a variety of tree species, a walking bridge, gazebo and numerous nature trails, Centennial Gardens is truly a glittering jewel in Floral Park's crown that will surely be a lasting legacy for generations to come.

Next to be honored was Jim Reid, a 60 year resident, who was awarded a Proclamation of Merit. The smartest thing I did when I first ran for mayor was to call Jim Reid and ask if he would walk door to door with me. With his gentle graciousness, he accepted immediately and, in the middle of winter, with snow underfoot, we went into the frigid night knocking on doors. I knew that an introduction from Jim Reid gave me instant creditability and that his blessing was worth, well, it was simply priceless.

It always seemed to me that the word gentleman, with all the dignity and grace it implies, was invented to describe someone just like Jim Reid. With his high standard of propriety, sense of honor and civic-mindedness, his standing in our community is immense and reverential. His life is an eloquent testimony to the soul of giving and service. During WWII, he served at Guadalcanal in the Pacific when the enemy literally owned the skies above and the ocean around it. He is a Chaplain for the Floral Park American Legion whose presence is deeply felt on Memorial Day and Veterans' Day. A long time member of the Recreation Committee, past president of the North End Civic Association, a lector at Our Lady of Victory Church and past president of the Floral Park Rotary Club; the list goes on, but it all comes down to this: God, Country, Community, Family.

Born into a family of 12 children with six of his own and 10 grandchildren, how fortunate we are that because of his generosity his extended family included the 16,000 residents of our village. On this past 20th of March, Jim Reid celebrated his 90th birthday and the wonder of it all is that he is still serving, still active, still contributing to so many organizations. What a man, what a life, what an example. In honor of this special birthday, I thought it best to present, on behalf of a grateful community, this heartfelt award while he is still, it seems to me, a young man.

Our next series of citations went to the Floral Park Memorial High School Girl's Varsity Basketball Team who have played together since junior high and have won three Nassau County Championships in a row and two consecutive Long Island Class "A" Championships.

When I look at our girls so young, so talented and so full of promise, I am soberly reminded that I am no longer a member of the frontier generation. The good news, however, is that they very much are, and from the advantage of simply having lived

longer, I reminded them that every phase of life has special blessings as well as challenges and that they are morally obligated to live every stage with good sense, grace and courage. They are off to a great start.

Seeing them in all their athletic and youthful glory it dawns on me, that they truly are, a triumph of nature. Memories of this special time have knitted their lives together where they have learned timeless lessons. Lessons such as teamwork is one of the most beautiful things they can experience and that any calling is great -- when greatly pursued. They are champions -- our champions. May God continue to bless and keep them.

Finally, Coach Mayerhofer, who led the team to their second Long Island Championship, received a Citation of Recognition. After 22 years of coaching and 394 wins, the coach is retiring. We wish him well and though there is sadness in the parting, it does not eclipse, nor shadow, the triumph of his career.

Tree Planting

With the first trappings of spring, one begins to feel, first softly, then strongly the pulsation of life that seemed dormant just a short while ago. Seedlings that have slept peacefully during the cheerless wintry months yawn and awaken to a process of fecundation where an abundance of living colors blossom to carpet and beautify the earth. Our spirits are similarly aroused by the promise of spring; we exult under the warmth of the sun until the imposition of those nasty allergens start to scratch our throats, clog our sinuses and run our noses.

These pestering pathological reactions are an affront to our senses, an indignity that reminds us that even the magical moments proceeding from the vernal equinox is not an unmixed blessing. Still, the miracles of spring are something to behold and our village does its part to be hospitable to nature's calling.

A proper welcome includes the planting of trees that, due to the recent harsh winter weather, was postponed. Adolescence they say can be postponed, never avoided, and so it is with the changing of the seasons. Spring got a late start, but now the clearer weather congenial to tree planting has arrived. All residents who are getting a tree in front of their home have been, I trust, happily notified. A white dot at the curb marks where the tree will be planted. Public Works will try to comply with resident requests for certain species, but the type of tree planted in front of your home will mainly depend on its availability.

Some of this year's species are October Glory, Crimson King, Sugar Maple and Greenspire Linden. Wire friendly trees will also be planted such as Purple Plum, Hedge Maple, Cleveland Select Pear and Japanese Tree Lilac. A total of 29 wire friendly trees that are being planted will qualify for a \$50.00 rebate per tree from LIPA.

The good news about trees is not only are they majestic, but these living giants require little care on your part. However, here are two friendly tips:

1. Twice a week, give your tree two pails of water if weather permits, even the in the winter.
2. Once a week, loosen the surface soil at the base of the tree to a depth of 2-3 inches.

MTA Budget Crisis

As state lawmakers continue to wrestle with the so-called doomsday budget, the MTA voted to dramatically increase fares and tolls while drastically cutting service. While I have been a steadfast critic of the MTA/LIRR urging them to enact work rule changes, downsize staff, streamline operations, take tougher stances with their unions and subcontract major functions to outside contractors such as track and railcar maintenance, the blame for their deplorable condition cannot be entirely laid at their doorstep.

For years Albany has chosen to spend exorbitant amounts to fund Medicaid education and the skyward benefits to public workers (including MTA's union workers) instead of investing in mass transit's physical infrastructure that is vital to the economic and cultural health of our future. More than ever, I see the wisdom of opposing the Third Track and its staggering price tag. We are informed that the Governor, the Majority Leader and the Leader of the NYS Assembly have tightly circled the wagons to surreptitiously plot and finagle to prevent a financial Armageddon. The clock has been ticking for years, but no one seemed to be able to tell time until its hands pointed to High Noon.

In response to the fast rising labor and debt costs plaguing every aspect of the budget, a notorious tax hike piggybacking on the fare increases and service costs as well as divestiture will fall heavily on Long Island taxpayers and commuters. The Pied Piper has to be paid and now us taxpayers stand in relation to Albany as did Oliver Hardy to Stan Laurel when, with theatrical exasperation, he threw up his hands to immortally utter, "This is another nice mess you got us into!"

Temporary Aircraft Relief in Sight

Some good news was reported to me by Trustee Mary-Grace Tomecki who reveals that from April 1st to the 30th, Runways 22R and 4L will remain closed at Kennedy International Airport, while additional taxiway exits and entrances are added in an effort to improve operational efficiencies on the ground.

As many of you are aware, aircraft arriving into 22R use a flight path directly over the Village of Floral Park. In recent years, 22R has been specifically utilized to capture what is referred to as an overflow from Runway 22L. This means that when the volume of arriving aircraft into Kennedy exceeds capacity on Runway 22L, air traffic controllers direct the so-called overflow to land on 22R. The result is two separate, but parallel streams of jet airplanes flying over Floral Park, disrupting the lives of our residents, who live either under the flight paths or between them.

Consequently, in the immediate, the full closures of 22R and 4L translate into a temporary reprieve from excessive noise generated by aircraft. However, more importantly, in the long-run, such improvements in efficiencies on the ground could mean expanded use of Runways 4L and 4R and less dependence on the 22s for arrivals into Kennedy, when the wind is measured at less than 10 knots per hour.

Trustee Tomecki is scheduled to meet with the Manager of JFK Tower in April to discuss further the implications of the month-long construction project for Floral Park.