

March 22, 2009

Village Election

I want to gratefully acknowledge the residents of Floral Park who came out to vote on Wednesday, March 18th, in the village election. Although this election was not contested, more than 575 voters took advantage of a beautiful, cloudless day to cast their ballot in support of the candidates.

I also want to congratulate Mayor-elect Kevin Greene, Trustee Mary-Grace Tomecki and Trustee-elect Dominick Longobardi on their election to public office. I've had the privilege of working closely with all these individuals and have known them to be public spirited, hardworking and committed to advancing the good and safety of this great village. They will be sworn into office on Monday evening, April 6th.

Eagle Scout Award

This past Saturday, I attended the Eagle Scout Ceremony for Michael Catalano and Sean Boell. It was a bittersweet affair for me in that it was the last such ceremony I will attend as the Mayor of Floral Park. While it was my disadvantage never to have been a scout myself, as an adult I find myself deeply drawn, if not moved, by the ideals and principles that give the Boy Scouts of America sustenance and life.

It was a privilege to witness two outstanding young men honored with the rank of Eagle Scout, scouting's most prized achievement. For his Eagle Scout project, Michael Catalano orchestrated a truly inspired drive for much needed supplies on behalf of Saint Albans VA Hospital. Paul Cain, past-Commander of the Floral Park American Legion Post, and who has the great honor of having three children serving in our Armed Forces, was there to pay an emotional and heartfelt tribute to Michael for his extraordinary efforts on behalf of our veterans.

Sean Boell directed his considerable energies to refurbish and beautify a section of Our Lady Queen of Peace, a senior residence run by the Little Sisters of the Poor for seniors who have no other means of support. Sister Elizabeth Anne from Our Lady Queen of Peace was there to honor Sean's commitment that led to this wonderful accomplishment.

The rituals of an Eagle Scout Ceremony are piloted by its high-minded ideals that celebrate achievement as much as it does a rite of passage. One comes to realize that scouting is a community consisting of the scouts yes, but also an array of adults and parents who volunteer as scoutmasters, troop leaders as well as committee chairs and their members. It is a uniting and inspiring experience. Through working together for some greater cause they realize, from the scout to the scoutmaster, their fullest individuality – a paradox Walt Whitman would have exuberantly celebrated as something uniquely American.

Scouting may be full of sport and adventure but underneath all the trappings of fun and frivolity is a moral seriousness, for it is about all the important things, the things you can't put a price tag on, things that teach timeless lessons about growing up, becoming a man, love of God and Country and living life bravely and imaginatively. That is no mean thing to guide our young toward, indeed it is a great and grand thing and so is the scouting program that makes it all possible.

Budget Musings

The Village Board is in the process of putting the finishing touches on our 2009-2010 budget. I'm confident that this economic cardiogram will divulge a strong fiscal heartbeat, a stable tax rate and a healthy fund balance. Scrutinizing every line of expenditure and revenue, the very grammar of the budgetary process, our policies have assured the continuation of quality services and our fiscal stewardship, even in these difficult times, will afford the community with the opportunity for innovation and even positive growth.

However, in a world where everything is connected, it would be a mistake to say the bleak economic picture of both our county and state does not threaten the stability we have labored so hard to achieve and sustain. Our scarred backs wince under the lash of their failure to keep their financial house in order. The recent sandblast of bad news from Wall Street has skinned off the epidermis of economic security comfortably clothing most Americans while leaving the budgets of cities and counties unsheltered, raw and naked. Yet even with the engine of Wall Street caput, New York City continues to ravenously eat up dollars even though their budget is on the verge of resembling the ruins of Pompeii.

There's the rub – municipal economics are programmed to spend not repress resources, even if they don't exist. Adam Smith may have said that a wise economy for a household cannot be folly for a kingdom but he failed to see the imperiousness of modern democratic politics and their insatiable hunger for entitlements. Nor could he envision the recklessness of mortgage policies that taunt and mock common sense by making home ownership a universal ideal of equality. The pressure to do so was wedded to the idea that not only is all politics local, they are also tribal. Machiavelli was right, as he so often was, when he observed that it is the nature of men to be as much bound by the benefits they confer as by those they receive. Translation: Politicians compel financial institutions to give away mortgages and those constituencies that benefit are bound by gratitude to reward them with their suffrages.

This cross-pollination between government policy and political favor occurs on many different and varied levels and the result is a river over-swollen with credit that has seriously, if not critically, de-leveraged the economy. Intemperance, however, defeats its own purpose and one does not need stage-lit prose to illuminate the current calamities that cry out for retribution, but will more likely lead to repetition if the appetites of the polity is not reconciled to the limitations of the economy.

Unfortunately, I see little evidence of this reality setting in. The amounts of benefits in Social Security and Medicare vastly exceed the amounts of past taxes even if they had been saved which, of course, they weren't. If anything, what's being cooked up in Washington regarding health care will, in the long run, almost certainly make things worse rather than better as the baby boomers in record numbers continue to age. It is all frightful and frightening.

What we need is for those in office to see the political objective with a Euclidian clear-sightedness and then to charge the economic beachhead with the guts of the U.S. Marines at Iwo Jima. But this is Congress, an army that more resembles Hogan's Heroes than Patton's armored divisions. Perhaps their recession, like most recessions, will be short-lived and we'll manage to fight another day. But unless entitlements are re-engineered and the politics of over-promise reined in, we will just be kicking the grenade down the road.