

Yorktown News

Vol. 8 No. 31

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Thursday, October 31, 2019

Halloween Parade



The Yorktown Halloween Parade and Carnival attracted hundreds of costumed residents for a spooky march through town. See more photos on pages 16 and 17.

PHOTO: KATHERINE BORCHERT

Care of local cemeteries is community effort

BY TRUDY WALZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Tradition holds—and society seems to concur—that everyone, upon passing, deserves to have their name engraved in stone. And Lynn Briggs, chair of Yorktown's Landmarks Preservation Commission, is doing what she can to make sure those names are as legible as possible

to all whose eyes light upon them. To that end, Briggs and her band of volunteers have undertaken an inventory of all abandoned cemeteries in the community, finding as many as nine in want. It also has launched an outreach effort, the first of its kind, by partnering with a variety of community stakeholders to bring the gravestones out of the weeds and into the open of the 21st century.

The cemetery that contains the remains of some of Yorktown's oldest residents—on some three acres astride the Community Church of Yorktown and extending to a brook and up a hill—has become a witness to that effort. Over the summer, the young hands at a new school and those of the members of the church's congregation, the landmarks commission and the employ-

ees of a regional business joined in the first phase of its cleanup. "It's really a cool thing," said Briggs, whose surname can be found on several markers in the cemetery that she didn't know were there until she explored it. "It kills me to see our war heroes, or anyone, disrespected, because every life has a value and a story." Terry Naumann, a landmarks

commission volunteer who handles its press, noted markers engraved with the names of some of the town's littlest inhabitants, its children. "There's a lot of heartrending tombstones there, but it is also a part of the history of Yorktown," Naumann said. "There are Revolutionary War people there, Civil

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YORKTOWN FOOTBALL

Huskers go to semis.
pg 20

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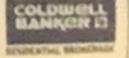
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Candidate profiles for District 1 legislator

Editor's note: Due to an editing error, the answers of another candidate were printed instead of Colin D. Smith's answers in the Oct. 24 edition. We are running the full piece again with the correct answers and apologize for the error.

Republican Frank Catalina faces Democrat Colin D. Smith for a two-year term as the District 1 legislator, which includes Buchanan, parts of Cortland, Peekskill and Yorktown.

We asked each of the candidates to talk briefly about themselves, their positions and goals. See their answers below:

Frank Catalina

Who are you? Provide a brief overview of your background and experience.

I grew up in Peekskill, graduated from Peekskill high school and I am and have been a practicing attorney here in Peekskill for the past 38 years. I became involved in politics when George Pataki ran for mayor of Peekskill. Thereafter, I became a part time attorney for Peekskill. I have served as city prosecutor; planning and zoning board attorney; attorney for every board and commission including attorney for the Peekskill housing authority; deputy corporation counsel; trial counsel and ultimately as the corporation counsel. I served under 5 different mayors of Peekskill. I ran and was elected as Peekskill's 23rd mayor and served two terms from 2014-2018.

Why do you want to be a county legislator?

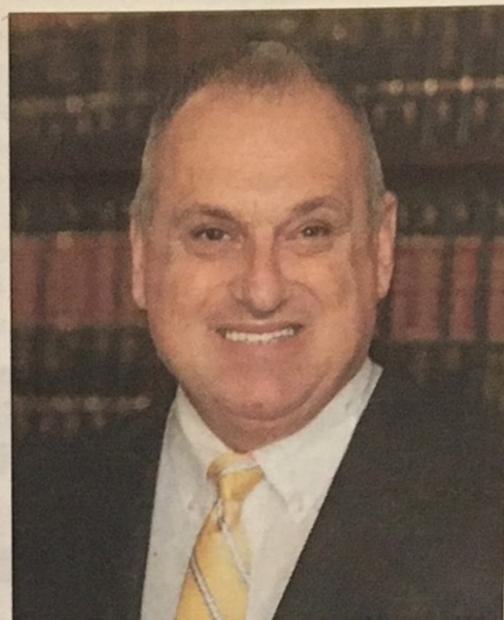
After having served in various positions as a lawyer, and after the death of my wife, with my three children off in college, I had the time and honor to serve as mayor. I have a solid record of achievements as mayor but

have seen the limitations of how far progress can be taken without further support from the county level of government. This district was well served by legislator John Testa for 10 years and George Oros before him. When John retired, I was recruited to run for the seat based upon my knowledge of the district, its problems and needs from the county level, and my ability to work constructively with the other party - having served my entire two terms as mayor in the minority. Quite frankly, the strong record of achievements in Peekskill would not have occurred without recruiting and retaining bi-partisan support. We have serious issues facing this district including Indian Point, the A.I.M. pipeline, the sanitary sewer district, homelessness and maintenance of our county roads and county parks. I know firsthand that when it comes to funding and services, everything north of 287 is severely short changed. I will fight that, whether its route 6 traffic and road repairs or more reasonable service on the bee-line bus system. On the county level, issues like the medical center, the airport and Playland will need bi-partisan efforts to make sure these institutions adequately serve Westchester.

What is a top priority for the county over the next five to 10 years?

Well, always making and trying to keep Westchester affordable by taxing less and spending smarter. Indian Point is a top priority for me and this district. The loss of revenues to the towns and school districts directly affected must be addressed not to mention the waste that will be stored there and affecting the area for generations to come.

I feel my solid record of achievements as mayor of Peekskill uniquely qualifies me to make a difference on the county board of legislators and I ask for your support.



Frank Catalina
Republican, Conservative, Independence



Colin D. Smith
Democratic, Working Families

Colin D. Smith

Who are you? Provide a brief overview of your background and experience.

I was born and raised in Peekskill. I am a graduate of the Peekskill High School (Class of '91), Cedarville University (OH—Class of '96) and Pace Law School (NY—Class of '03). I am admitted to practice law in both NY and CT, as well as the Federal Court in the Southern District of NY. After graduating law school, I worked as an Assistant Bronx District Attorney. From there, I worked for several private firms until 2015 when I decided to open my own office in Peekskill and have worked there ever since. I was elected to the Peekskill City School Board in 2012 and again in 2015. In 2017, I was elected to, and currently sit on, the Peekskill Common Council.

Why do you want to be a county legislator?

I am running for County Legislator to

better serve the residents of Peekskill and its surrounding communities. Shortages in affordable living solutions, unemployment, crumbling infrastructure and environmental challenges are all pressing issues that urgently need to be addressed.

What is a top priority for the county over the next five to 10 years?

I have a few, namely—jobs, affordability and the environment. I will work with state and local officials, labor unions and the business community to provide more good-paying jobs for our residents. I will demand that the state and federal governments make health and environmental safety top priority during the decommissioning of Indian Point while also fighting to ensure they do everything possible to blunt the impact of lost tax revenues. Last but not least, I will work to increase affordable solutions for residents, especially for senior citizens who should be allowed to age in place.

CLEANUP

FROM PAGE 1

War people there. It just goes on and on."

An estimated 550 times, in fact, dating to 1760.

With so many interred, Briggs understated, "It's a big undertaking."

The idea for the outreach effort was born of an inquiry by a local Scout troop leader who was interested in opportunities to suggest for Eagle Scout projects, such as the cleanup of abandoned gravesites, Briggs said. She went to the church on Baptist Road, which was landmarked in 1976, and investigated what was necessary in pursuit of that goal, fleshing out the terms and conditions of such a project, including insurance coverage. Although so armed, the Scouts never followed up.

She was aware, however, of a school that had opened the previous September, the Shrub Oak International School, and approached its administration with the pitch that as "a new tenant in town," there was an opportunity for the commission to develop an intern program with its students, whose ages range from 14 to 22.

"I thought because these kids are on a wide range of the autism spectrum, some of them are clearly more high-functioning than others, and I thought this would be a perfect project for

them to undertake, and they agreed right away," said Briggs, adding, "It actually was fortuitous that the Boy Scout didn't follow through."

What was not to like? As Candace Baugh, the transition coordinator at the school, explained, it promised to benefit the students both academically and socially.

Baugh said Shrub Oak, which she estimated has an enrollment of 25 to 30, is a "transdisciplinary school," focusing on education across disciplines. Academically, the project helps students develop skills applicable to science, technology and history; socially, it helps strengthen their abilities to pay attention to detail and follow directions, work with others as well as independently, and understand the concept and importance of performing community service.

"It's really an educational program where there's an academic part, there's just some time outside of school," Baugh said.

Baugh said two or three students participated in the summer, but since school has reopened for the new year, "We expanded our team and we have five now."

The tasks are tailored to each student according to their function levels, but, she said, "A couple of them are on top of it and do every task."

Nor are the tasks too complicated. According to Briggs, the project was designed

in phases, starting out small to avoid overwhelming the students.

"We mapped off 10 columns and five rows, right by the church," she said. "We scoped it out and defined it so the teachers know what the scope is."

The next step: Clean the cemetery grounds. And then? Clean the markers.

The latter is the only part that has entail both some expense and expert training, delivered by MonuMedic of Sleepy Hollow. Briggs learned of MonuMedic when the landmarks commission sought bids for the redesign of signs distinguishing Yorktown's 15 historical landmarks (the Community Church among them). As the cemetery cleanup project took shape, she said she invited the business to be a partner. Its employees instructed a group in June on how to clean the monuments and identified what supplies and materials were necessary—brushes, scrapers, chalk sticks, Orvus soap, and D/2 Biological Solution (at \$85 a gallon), which is applied after cleaning and scraping and works over time (two to three weeks) to remove the lichen and algae.

But another part of the project is equally monumental: matching the names on the gravestones to documentation in hand and validating the information.

"It's a win-win," said Community Church

Pastor Joseph Vigilante, noting the benefits to all of the project's stakeholders as well as members of the general public who often stop by to wander the cemetery grounds. Vigilante explained that the church's congregation is small and its members are older, "so being able to get the young people to come along and give a hand, we appreciate it."

And for those who know Briggs, it will come as no surprise that she has plans to expand the work, most recently reaching out to Lakeland High School Honor Society members who may have internship obligations to fulfill for college.

"From what I gather from school officials," Briggs said, the integration of students from the public and private schools offers both "a great experience."

Furthermore, she enthused, "It's a highly leverageable project" that's "easily replicable" for other educational, religious, civic and social groups interested in performing community service.

Having once been on the short end of knowledge in relation to the whereabouts of her own grandmother's remains, Briggs explained, for her, the endeavor is also personal.

"I have an affinity for wanting to protect those who have gone before us and who my have now been disrespected or not cared for or lost in shuffle, if you will."