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And the Erie County Independent

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2018

A HAMBURG SUN INVESTIGATION

For three years, the Town of Evans spent at least \$219,000 annually on private contractors to cut grass and maintain delinquent properties – a fraction of what larger towns spent. Erie County taxpayers paid the town back, no questions asked.

\$691,600

County taxpayers foot bill for Evans' no-bid home maintenance

BY LUKE HAMMILL / SUN STAFF REPORTER

The modest brick house at 1040 Backus Road in Derby doesn't stand out much from the other lots on the quiet street.

It sits on a half-acre site at the corner of Catherine Street. It's 1,750 square feet, was built in 1958 and boasts three bedrooms, a bathroom and a fireplace. In 2013, its owners had fallen into financial trouble and the one-story house was ultimately headed to a foreclosure auction. But in the two years that followed, a residential lot no different than any other in town turned into a cash cow for a private contractor at county taxpayers' expense – all under the direction of officials in the Town of Evans.

Erie County taxpayers paid a Farnham company, SRJ Property Services, more than \$16,100 over two years to maintain the Backus Road property. And that's just a fraction of the more than \$257,000 SRJ Property Services made across the Town of Evans over the three-year stretch from 2013 to 2015 under a no-bid arrangement funded by the county.

SRJ – then called Fletcher & Lochlan,

according to a town official – visited the Backus Road site and charged \$500 on a January 2013 invoice through a policy under which Town of Evans officials hired contractors to maintain delinquent properties by cutting the grass and doing other upkeep. The town simultaneously slapped a \$150 surcharge, designed to account for overhead costs, on the property tax bill.

Fletcher & Lochlan billed the town for more work on the property in March, April and May 2013, charging \$500 each time. Again in June, this time for \$850. Twice in August, for a total of \$1,580. And again and again, as the calendar turned to 2014 and the company changed its name to SRJ, continuing to rack up work on Backus Road and elsewhere in Evans. The \$150 surcharges were also piling up for Evans Town Hall – more than \$5,500 from 1040 Backus alone.

The company billed the town for the Backus Road property on 23 separate dates in 2013 and 2014 and made an average of about \$700 each time, according to Town of Evans records obtained by The Hamburg Sun. After the town compensat-

"IT'S A TERRIBLE CYCLE THAT TAXPAYERS ARE BEING FORCED TO DEAL WITH THIS BURDEN. ... FUNDAMENTALLY, IT'S NOT RIGHT."

– Jocelyn Gordon,
executive director of
local nonprofit land bank

ed SRJ and other companies who completed the property-maintenance work on Backus and at other sites across Evans, Erie County taxpayers paid the town back. County taxpayers also reimbursed Evans for the surcharges on the tax bill.

A Hamburg Sun investigation, based on months of interviews and an analysis of town, county and state records, found that Evans spent more than \$219,000 every year on maintaining delinquent

See **Homes** on Page A4

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Highway chief says he needs more staff

By Michael Petro
HAMBURG SUN EDITOR

Hamburg's highway superintendent implored the Town Board to allow him to transfer money from the department's fund balance to payroll to hire an additional full-time employee.

With the winter season nearing and snow already falling, Ted Casey said at Monday's work session he needs to get his staff back to 31 workers in the highway department and called it an "emergency" and a "matter of public safety."

However, due to some concerns over funding the position, at a salary of about \$50,342 plus benefits, the Town Board passed a resolution only to add the 31st laborer position in the highway department. A funding source must still be determined before the hire can be approved by the board and made by Casey.

Casey said Monday the 2019 budget recently passed puts his department at 30 employees, which is the lowest number since 1992. The highway department had 31 full-time workers in 2018, Casey added.

"We've already had two or three snow events, and this is a request to restore the 31st position," he said. "I'm foreshadowing based upon what's been happening the past two weeks with the snow that we're going to struggle without having that 31st position, at a minimum."

Supervisor Jim Shaw pointed out that the highway department's budget will be up next year about \$155,000 from 2018, so he and other board members said they believed money from alternative highway budget line items could be used to take care of the hire.

He added Samantha Tarczynski, the town's finance director, has concerns about the fund balance being too low for that money to be allocated for the position.

Tarczynski wrote in a memo that she was worried about using money from the department's fund balance, which sits at \$371,548 and is used in the case of emergencies. With one month of expenditures for the highway department averaging \$555,569, the fund balance does not contain enough money to pay for an entire month, if needed, she wrote in the memo, adding that a healthy fund balance would pay for at least three months.

She said during Monday's work session that a laborer also would have to be added in the Erie County civil service bank for the town, because only 30 laborers were budgeted for in 2019. She added another option would be to promote a current laborer, which would be an additional cost, to make room for the potential new hire.

See **Highway** on Page A2



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LOCAL NEWS

Breakfast with Santa



Maddie Chudova tells Santa what she wants during Saturday's Breakfast With Santa.

Photos by John Normile/Special to The Sun
Bryan Jablonski reads to sons Logan Nawrcyniec and Camden Jablonski during Breakfast With Santa on Saturday at American Legion Post 527 in Hamburg.

Adeline Black enjoys a seasonal treat during Breakfast With Santa.

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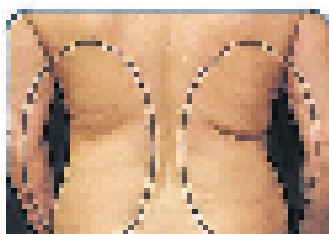
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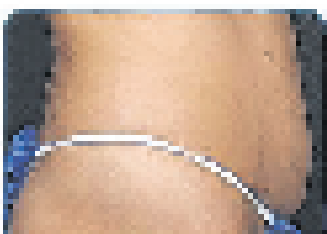
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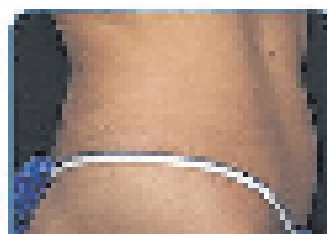
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Taxpayers lost \$13,900 in the case of one property

HOMES From Page A1

properties in the three years before current Supervisor Mary K. Hosler took office in 2016. In total, the town spent \$691,600 over the three-year period. All the while, the county paid the town back, as stipulated by state and Erie County tax law. What's more, the work was awarded to contractors without a competitive bidding process.

While county records make it difficult to determine exactly how much of the maintenance costs ultimately were not recouped, the Backus Road home demonstrates that, in some cases, taxpayers come out on the losing end – in this instance at least \$13,900 behind, according to The Sun's analysis of just three years of maintenance activity.

As a result of the arrangement, Evans officials and their contractors had no incentive to be frugal. They knew Erie County would reimburse the town for its costs, and the lack of a competitive bidding process meant maintenance companies didn't have to beat each other to the lowest price.

The system also resulted in inflated real estate prices for Evans homes in delinquency – since charges for the maintenance went on the property tax bills and were thus included in sale prices – and inconsistency in pricing across Erie County, with towns like Evans ratcheting up maintenance charges and other towns keeping costs lower. The lack of standardized, county-wide prices for maintenance jobs means towns and villages pay whatever they like for the work and are then reimbursed.

"It's terrible for the taxpayers," Jocelyn Gordon, executive director of a local nonprofit land bank that occasionally acquires properties like 1040 Backus, said of the arrangement under which towns and villages charge large amounts for maintenance work and Erie County pays them back. "It's a terrible cycle that taxpayers are being forced to deal with this burden. ... Fundamentally, it's not right."

Evans is not the only Erie County town or village that has taken advantage of the system, Gordon said. But Evans' six-figures-per-year spending totals were way out of line with its significantly larger neighbor, Hamburg, whose property-maintenance costs from 2013 to 2015 hovered between \$19,000 and \$37,000, tax warrants show. And the towns of Boston and Eden don't do such work on private property at all.

The arrangement's cost to taxpayers

Assigning contractors to the property-maintenance work from 2013 to 2015 was the responsibility of Charles LaBarbera, the longtime code enforcement officer in Evans and the Village of Angola.

The town's response since 2016

Evans Councilwoman Jeanne Macko, who took office with Supervisor Mary K. Hosler in 2016, said she has reviewed the town's property-maintenance program.

"People in this town were very upset because the vacant properties near them were not being cut," Macko said. "So back then, it was like, every week or every two weeks, somebody went out and cut the grass."

She said contractors hired by the town also changed locks, boarded up homes, cleaned lots and physically removed garbage and rubbish. Because a lot of that other work was done in previous years, Macko said, the town is now in most cases only hiring contractors to cut grass.

Since 2016, Evans has tweaked the property-maintenance program, Macko said, with varying results.

In 2016, unlike in previous years, the town bid the work out, but that "delayed the whole process," according to Macko. It was July before many residents saw the lawn being cut at delinquent properties. The next year, the town asked certain companies to cut grass for a price named by the town. But that price was "so low," Macko said, that "only one person was doing the grass-cutting because nobody else would accept that price."

Town records corroborate Macko's statements. Evans has in recent years decreased its spending on the property-maintenance work to \$57,000 in 2016 and \$15,410 in 2017, records show.

This year, according to Macko, the town "created a fair price for companies to get paid, and I believe we ended up getting three different people that accepted our pricing." Other contractors, Macko added, can ask to be included on the list, as well.

"It kind of goes back to the same way that it was done in 2015," Macko said.

– Luke Hammill

A closer look at the high cost of maintaining delinquent homes

The Backus Road property wasn't the only one where grass-cutting companies made money from 2013 to 2015 on taxpayers' dime. Here's a sampling of the dozens of Evans lots where work took place. In addition to these maintenance charges, the town places a \$150 surcharge, designed to account for overhead costs, on the property tax bill for each invoice it processes.

720 Birch St.

Built: 1920

Home/property specs: 1,404 square feet/0.23 acres

Company completing work: SRJ Property Services

Number of dates invoiced, 2013-15: 27

Total cost of maintenance work: \$18,720

Cost per date invoiced: Just over \$690

Price on deed when acquired by BENLIC: \$153,859

Sold by BENLIC for: \$6,000 (under contract, as of Dec. 5)

BENLIC repayment to county: None yet, as of Dec. 5

Will repayment cover 2013-15 maintenance work? No

76 Chestnut Lane

Built: 1945

Home/property specs: 1,092 square feet/0.34 acres

Company completing work: SRJ Property Services

Number of dates invoiced, 2013-15: 17

Total cost of maintenance work: \$10,865

Cost per date invoiced: just over \$640

Price on deed when acquired by BENLIC: \$25,000

Sold by BENLIC for: \$33,000

BENLIC repayment to county: \$15,422

Did repayment cover 2013-15 maintenance work? Yes

9194 Lake Shore Road

Built: 1961

Home/property specs: 1,400 square feet/0.44 acres

Companies completing maintenance work: SRJ Property Services, Todd's Landscaping

Number of dates invoiced, 2013-15: 10

Total cost of maintenance work: \$4,730

Cost per date invoiced: \$473

Price on deed when acquired by BENLIC: \$112,500

Sold by BENLIC for: \$50,100

BENLIC repayment to county: \$22,048

Did repayment cover 2013-15 maintenance work? Yes

In order to perform maintenance work on a residential property, the town had to wait five days after issuing a code violation notice, according to LaBarbera. A property didn't need to be tax-delinquent for Evans contractors to perform work there, but many of them were.

After that, LaBarbera would consult a list of local contractors. Any company with the proper insurance could get on the list to perform the services, LaBarbera said. He would call the contractors on the order they appeared on his list, he said.

"If they didn't want it or couldn't get it done in a reasonable amount of time, I went to the next contractor," LaBarbera said.

The work wasn't competitively bid, according to LaBarbera, but the town's law "never said we had to bid it out," he added. The town "had a list of set charges" that contractors were allowed to bill for certain types of work and it was only later that "it was said that we should have followed a bidding process, but I never knew that," LaBarbera said.

LaBarbera said the company that completed the largest share of the work across the town from 2013 to 2015, Fletcher & Lochlan, changed its name to SRJ Property Services. The two other



Photos by John Normile / Special to The Sun

Erie County taxpayers paid more than \$16,100 over two years to maintain the 1040 Backus Road property.

companies he used most were Todd's Landscaping and Empire Lawncare & Hardscapes, both of Evans, although other businesses completed some of the work, as well, according to LaBarbera and town records.

Even though county taxpayers subsidize maintenance activity on properties in Evans and other towns and villages, Erie County officials say, they come out ahead in the end because the county charges high interest rates on properties in tax delinquency. That means the burden for making up the losses taxpayers take on sites like 1040 Backus falls on some delinquent taxpayers who have simply fallen on tough financial times or those who eventually buy the properties.

"We're charging interest at 18 percent per year," said Joseph L. Maciejewski, Erie County director of real property tax services.

Also, officials say, the maintenance charges remain on the tax bill in addition to any delinquent taxes. So even after the county reimburses the town, the county is often paid back itself when banks or other buyers foreclose on or purchase properties and pay off the late taxes and maintenance charges.

In other words, the large pool of properties on which the county is charging interest for delinquent taxes makes up for the relative few where there have been expensive maintenance charges – and even those maintenance charges are usually paid back upon the sale of the properties, officials say.

"We do end up collecting all of our money eventually, two or three years down the road," Maciejewski said.

But not always. The 1040 Backus property ended up – as such properties do every so often, records show – in the hands of the Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corp., or BENLIC, a state-funded land bank that acquires tax-delinquent or abandoned property, brings it up to code and sells it. BENLIC acquired the



"Because they're just going to get paid anyway."

Gordon said that when "all is said and done, Erie County collects 100 percent or typically more of the money it is owed" because of the high annual interest rates. But she acknowledged that taxpayers were subsidizing the grass-cutting activity at particular properties, even if they made up the difference on other properties.

Towns and villages often cut the grass at derelict houses "in order to keep rodents away from the neighborhood" and in response to complaints from neighbors, said John Mills, who is the Erie County legislator representing Evans and was previously an Orchard Park town councilman. But, he added, it usually cost about \$1,000 per year to maintain the grass at a given property. In Evans, the town paid Fletcher & Lochlan \$850 after the company submitted a June 2013 bill for 1040 Backus Road, then added a \$150 surcharge.

"That doesn't sound right. ... A thousand dollars a day to maintain a property sounds like something that needs to be looked into," Mills said.

Attempts to reach SRJ Property Services, whose address listed by the state Division of Corporations is

a residential property in the Village of Farnham, were unsuccessful. LaBarbera said Steven Hamm and Raymond Pugh were representatives of the company, and both men have been listed as owners of the Farnham residential property.

A Hamburg Sun reporter left a note and a business card with a woman who answered the door at the home in Farnham. The woman said Hamm, listed as the current owner of the home, still lived there but that SRJ Property Services was no longer located at the site. Hamm never returned the message.

A Todd's Landscaping representative declined comment.

Tammy Lonkey, an accountant for Empire Lawncare & Hardscapes, said the company's work went beyond grass cutting and involved boarding up homes and other cleanup services. Empire completed about \$26,900 in work at 15 properties in 2013, \$15,400 at 14 properties in 2014 and \$26,900 at 22 properties in 2015, records show.

"We were following the rules," Lonkey said, although she said she has heard about "controversy in the past" about "how many times other people were doing it." She has no direct knowledge of such controversy, she said.

Lonkey said cutting the grass at a typical small yard might cost \$65 – and maybe \$125 for a big yard. But records show Empire charged \$440 on a 2013 invoice for 187 Rosewood Ave., and \$1,260 for a 2013 invoice for 6852 Chaffee Court in Derby, for example.

In addition to cutting grass and boarding up homes, companies cleaned up and drained in-ground and above-ground pools, LaBarbera said, adding that the work was generated by neighbor complaints. Once a company was called to a property once, however, the property was "theirs for the season, and every two weeks, they'd go out," according to LaBarbera.

Don Potenza, manager at Buffalo Lawn & Landscape – a company not involved in Evans' grass-cutting services during the years in question – said the amount charged in the town during that time for the services "sounds like it's high." But he said he wouldn't jump to a conclusion because many factors can account for the price of a grass cut – the size of the lot, the condition of the lawn and whether or not the town requires paying employees the prevailing wage, which can be as high as \$52 an hour.

Empire usually pays its employees about \$12 to \$14 an hour, Lonkey said.

"It's not like we were just ripping the town off. ... We weren't allowed to mow every week," Lonkey said. "There was criteria you had to follow. ... This year, we only made a few thousand, if that."

Arrangement investigated by the DA

Evans Supervisor Mary K. Hosler was so alarmed by the property-maintenance activity in the town that shortly after starting her term in 2016, she reported it to the Erie County District Attorney's Office. A spokeswoman for the district attorney said the office investigated and "found no criminal wrongdoing that we could prove in court beyond a reasonable doubt."

Charles LaBarbera, the longtime code enforcement officer in Evans who was responsible for assigning contractors to the property-maintenance work, said he never personally benefited from any of the activity. He denied any wrongdoing and said Hosler has "slandered" his name by drawing attention to the issue.

"It's all political," LaBarbera said.

He added that "if the town didn't like what we were doing, the Town Board should have stepped up" and said previous supervisors Robert R. Catalino II, Francis J. Pordum and Keith E. Dash "never had a problem with what I did."

LaBarbera said the state comptroller audited the town from 2013 to 2015 and concluded that Evans officials mismanaged finances, which sent the town into an economic tailspin. But state auditors didn't "ever have a problem" with Evans' property-maintenance efforts, he said.

Catalino, who left office at the end of 2007, declined to comment. Dash, the supervisor from 2012 to 2015, didn't return a phone call seeking comment. Pordum, whose term fell between Catalino's and Dash's, said in a phone interview that the town received "complaints from some citizens about properties that were unkempt."

"We had the properties taken care of, at least, so the neighbors didn't have to suffer with these things being next door to them," Pordum said.

Pordum added that he wasn't aware of any foul play and that the town was "doing a service to our residents."

"People used to thank us," Pordum said.

– Luke Hammill

County official: System 'needs to be looked into'

Gordon said "numerous towns and villages" have "similar practices" to Evans' model of cutting the grass at delinquent properties and getting paid back by the county.

"I think, unfortunately, the system enables all these towns and villages to really not care too much to say, 'Hey, let's think about whether \$600 is really insane to charge for a grass cut,'" Gordon said.

LOCAL NEWS

Idea for summer-school rebrand presented to Frontier School Board

By Luke Hammill
HAMBURG SUN STAFF REPORTER

The teacher who oversaw the Frontier Central School District's summer school program this year wants to rebrand and improve the negative-sounding "summer school" into a multi-faceted "summer learning" program. The shift would reflect the reality already on the ground at the summer school, where courses are offered not only to students who failed classes or exams but also to pupils wanting to get a jump on next year's curriculum, said Amber Chandler, a Frontier Middle School teacher who directed the summer school in 2018.

"So many good things are happening there," Chandler said of the summer school at last Tuesday night's Board of Education meeting. Enrollment at the summer school continued to decline but has leveled off since dropping sharply between 2015 and 2017, according to Chandler's presentation to the board on Dec. 4. In 2015, 652 students attended summer school at Frontier; this year, there were 430 students, down from 451 last year. There were 163 students this year with special education needs. The summer school draws heavily from the Orchard Park, Hamburg, West Seneca and East Aurora school districts, as well as from St. Francis High School. District officials have speculated that one reason for the decline in enrollment has been the opening of other summer schools such as the one in the nearby Lake Shore

Central School District. Chandler proposed ideas for attracting more students to the summer program, including expanding the number of courses available and offering two-week enrichment courses in drama, coding, writing and art. The district could also hold transitional "boot camps" between fifth and sixth grades and eighth and ninth grades, as students change schools. Board President Janet MacGregor Plarr seemed interested in exploring Chandler's ideas further. "We look forward to the proposals that you put forth,"

Plarr said. Summer school students did well this year in courses like seventh-grade math; seventh and eighth-grade English-language arts; 12th-grade English; Algebra II; chemistry; art; and economics. They struggled, however, in ninth-grade English and Algebra I and on Regents exams in Algebra I, geometry, Earth Science and U.S. history. "I think there's room for improvement," Chandler said, though she noted that most students improved on Regents exams in English-language arts, Algebra I and geometry.

Joining Chandler for Tuesday's presentation was Frontier Central High School social studies teacher Sue Wilhelm who was the assistant director of the summer school program this year. "This was a success," Wilhelm said, thanking Assistant Superintendent of Instruction Colleen Duggan for her support. Duggan returned the compliment. "Sue and Amber make a great summer school team," she said.

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POLICE BLOTTER

Blasdell convenience store robbed by man with knife

The Sunoco gas station and APlus convenience store at the corner of South Park Avenue and Milestrip Road in Blasdell was robbed at knifepoint Dec. 5, according to village police.

The store clerk told police a man had entered the store, threatened her with a knife and demanded money from the cash register, according to a police report. She gave him about \$50, police said.

The store manager provided surveillance video that showed a man enter the store at 3:10 a.m., wearing a black scarf covering all of his face except for his eyes, a dark sweatshirt with the hood up and gloves. He pulled a knife from his pocket and demanded the money. He appeared to flee southward toward Milestrip Road, according to the report.

Hamburg police assisted, but officials were unable to find anybody fitting the suspect's description.

Man arrested in Eden for DWI

A man who recorded a blood alcohol content three times the legal limit was arrested Sunday for impaired driving following a traffic stop on Shadagee Road in Eden according to a Town of Eden police report.

Anthony C. Todaro, 57, was charged with aggravated driving while intoxicated.

At 4:07 p.m., police observed Todaro's vehicle repeatedly cross over the fog line and fail to keep right. Police stopped the vehicle and noted that Todaro exhibited signs of intoxication, according to the report.

Todaro failed a series of roadside sobriety tests and was arrested. He provided a breath sample indicating a blood-alcohol level of 0.235 percent, according to police.

He was due back in court this coming Tuesday.

Arkansas man arrested in Hamburg for illegal firearm possession

An Arkansas man was arrested Dec. 6 in Hamburg on weapons charges following a traffic stop at St. Francis Drive and Big Tree Road, according to a Town of Hamburg police report.

Jeff L. Perdue, 47, of Waldo, Ark., was charged with two felony counts of criminal possession of a firearm.

At about 12:45 a.m., police pulled Perdue over after observing him traveling westbound on Route 5 in excess of the speed limit, according to the report.

Perdue told police he had a semi-automatic pistol and a derringer in the car when asked if there was anything in the vehicle that an officer should know about, according to the report.

He was arrested and arraigned and was due back in court this coming Thursday.

Hamburg man charged with impaired driving after hit-and-run

A Hamburg man was arrested for misdemeanor driving while intoxicated following a report of a hit-and-run accident Saturday, Town

of Hamburg police said.

Perry R. Heck, 50, of Waterview Parkway, was also charged with felony aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle, a harassment violation and a traffic infraction for leaving the scene of a property damage accident, according to a police report.

At 7:38 p.m., police responded to a hit-and-run call on South Roxbury Drive, according to the report. The caller said he tried to stop a driver who hit his girlfriend's vehicle from leaving the scene and had a physical altercation with the driver.

The caller had the driver's vehicle information and police used it to find Heck on Waterview Parkway.

Police detected signs of intoxication, according to the report, and Heck told police he got "clipped" before saying he wasn't going to talk to police. Heck was detained and identified as the driver of the hit-and-run vehicle at the scene of the accident, police said.

Heck was taken to the police station and refused a chemical test. His license was found to be revoked.

He was released on an appearance ticket to his attorney, according to the report.

Buffalo woman arrested for unlicensed operation

A Buffalo woman was arrested in Blasdell for aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle following a traffic stop Sunday, according to a report from village police.

Bridgette N. Craver, 24, of Hopkins Street, was also charged with operating a motor vehicle with a suspended registration.

Police pulled Craver over after a plate reader activated while she was driving on South Park Avenue, according to the report.

Police found that her license was suspended and that her vehicle registration was also suspended.

She was taken into custody and released on a summons.

Lake Shore High evacuated after botched chemistry experiment

Students, faculty and staff were briefly evacuated from Lake Shore High School last Friday after a chemistry experiment set off a fire alarm, Town of Evans police said.

The alarm went off at 8:29 a.m., according to a police report. A wing of the building on the second floor was "filled with light gray smoke." District employees were opening doors and windows to ventilate the building, according to police.

Evans Center firefighters responded and helped ventilate the building.

A teacher told police the chemistry experiment involved a reaction that causes a burst into a purple flame, according to the report. The teacher said he believed too much chemical was used. No damage was sustained, according to the report.

Students, faculty and staff were cleared to return

to the building at 8:51 a.m., according to police.

Missing person reported in Evans

A report of a missing person in Evans Dec. 6 was referred to the Town of Evans Police Department's detective bureau, according to a police report.

Mark F. Pelgrin, 65, was last seen Dec. 2, police said. He's described as about 5 feet, 11 inches tall and weighing about 190 pounds with short salt-and-pepper hair and no tattoos.

Police said Pelgrin had medical conditions that needed immediate attention.

Anyone with information about Peglin is asked to call police at 549-3600 and reference incident number 18-825007.

No injuries reported from accidental fire at house in Derby

A Dec. 4 fire at a Derby home on Peppertree Drive attracted a response from

the Highland Hose, North Evans, Evans Center, Lake Erie Beach, Angola, Brant and Lake View fire departments, according to a Town of Evans police report.

Police were dispatched to the fire at 9:55 p.m., according to the report. The homeowners said there were no injuries, and all occupants and pets had been evacuated. They had a wood stove fire going, and the chimney area was on fire, according to police.

The cause of the fire was determined to be a buildup of debris in the chimney and a cracked chimney liner, which caused the fire to spread outside the chimney, police said.

The fire was deemed accidental in nature.

Four charged with drug possession in Hamburg

Four young adults were charged with drug possession following a traffic stop in Hamburg last Friday, Town of Hamburg police said.

Justin D. Wesolek, 20, of Eden; Frank J. Amanti, 23, of Cheektowaga; Nicholas R. Sheppard, 21, of Buffalo; and Kourtney Killian, 22, of

Cheektowaga, were charged with criminal possession of a controlled substance, according to a police report.

At 1:13 a.m., police stopped Killian's 2007 Volvo S60 on Milestrip Road near California Road after watching it straddle two lanes while driving eastbound for about half a mile, causing another vehicle on the road to not be able to safely pass.

Police smelled marijuana emanating from the car, asked for identification and discovered one of the occupants had a warrant from the Town of Tonawanda, according to the report. A search of the car and its occupants yielded a crack pipe, suspected cocaine, suspected LSD, marijuana and open containers of alcohol, police said.

The four occupants were arrested and issued appearance tickets.

Minnesota man driving with suspended license arrested in village

A Minnesota man was arrested in Hamburg for aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle on Monday, Village of Hamburg police said.

Terrance R. Boyd, 35, was also charged with operating a motor vehicle with a suspended registration and resisting arrest, according to a police report.

Police were taking radar at 11:08 a.m. from the Hamburg High School parking lot on Legion Drive, according to the report.

An officer pulled Boyd over after clocking him at 30 miles per hour and observing tinted windows on his vehicle, police said. Boyd provided a Minnesota driver's license, and police checked his license in both Minnesota and New York, according to the report.

Police found Boyd had an open suspension in New York and attempted to arrest him, according to the report. Boyd refused to step out of the vehicle, and police pulled him outside the vehicle while Boyd continued to resist, police said.

Police eventually handcuffed Boyd and brought him back to the station for booking, according to the report. His car was towed and impounded, police said.

He was released on \$50 bail and was due to return this coming Wednesday, according to the report.

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IN BRIEF

Gift wrapping fundraiser offered at McKinley Mall

The Zonta Club of Hamburg-Orchard Park will be wrapping gifts in front of Victoria's Secret at the McKinley Mall from Dec. 14 to 24.

The club will wrap all gifts, including ones purchased online. The proceeds from this fundraiser support scholarships for adults and high school students and local domestic violence awareness initiatives.

St. Francis of Assisi to dedicate new space on Sunday

St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Athol Springs will be dedicating its new gathering space just completed at 10 a.m. Sunday at 4253 St. Francis Drive, Athol Springs.

The space will be dedicated to Sister Mary Anne Siwak, FSSJ, who, now retired, has served in the faith community for more than 40 years.

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OBITUARIES

JANE M. (FOSS) COTTON, ACTIVE IN HAMBURG AND EVANS HOME BUREAUS

March 26, 1930 – Nov. 24, 2018



Jane M. Cotton of Hamburg, formerly of Angola, died Nov. 24. She was 88. Born and raised in East Aurora, she lived on her family's dairy farm growing up. Mrs. Cotton, the former Jane M. Foss, was a homemaker who enjoyed spending time with her family and friends. She and Marvin G. Cotton were married on Christmas Eve 1949. Mr. Cotton passed away in 1997. Mrs. Cotton was active in the Evans Home Bureau and the Hamburg Home Bureau, as well as her churches, First Baptist Church in East Aurora, United Church of Christ in Angola and St. Matthews Church of Christ in Hamburg. She lived in Angola from 1970 to 2000 and in Hamburg for the past 18 years. Family and friends say she'll be most remembered for her sweet personality and genuine kindness. She is survived by son Jeffrey Cotton; daughter Linda (Robert) Ferraro; and granddaughter Caitlin (Justin) Kahabka. In addition to her husband, she was predeceased by sister Virginia (late Russell) Mum; and brother William (late Betty) Foss. A memorial service was held Dec. 1 at St. Matthews United Church of Christ, 5289 McKinley Parkway, Hamburg. Memorial may be made to St. Matthews United Church of Christ. Arrangements were made by Addison Funeral Home, Inc.

rita M. CLEMONS, WORKED AT HAMBURG-AREA NEWSPAPERS, ENJOYED PAINTING LOCAL LANDMARKS

Oct. 27, 1922 – Nov. 26, 2018



Rita M. Clemons of Hamburg died of natural causes Nov. 26. She was 96. Born in Springville to the late Helen and William Clark Sr., she graduated from Riverside High School in Buffalo. In May 1946, she and Joseph M. Clemons were married. They moved to Hamburg in 1961 and were married 50 years until his death in May 1996. She worked in the newspaper industry for more than 10 years, first at the local Pennysaver and then at The Hamburg Sun in the prepress department. A lifelong painter, she was a member of a local artists' group and entered art shows at the Erie County Fair and elsewhere. She was also a longtime member at SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church. She and her husband, who worked in the printing industry, also wrote and published a newsletter for the local ministry, Comfort My People. She is survived by her children Patricia (late James) Ward, Rosina (late Robert) Morford, Maureen (late John) Klem, Mary (Kenneth) Jarosz and numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by her husband, Joseph M. Clemons, and her children Gregory Clemons and Margaret (late David) Kelley. Services were held Dec. 1 at SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church.

JEAN A. HAAS, TAUGHT IN HOPEVALE SCHOOLS, SERVED AS ELECTION INSPECTOR

July 3, 1936 – Nov. 29, 2018



Jean A. Haas, of Hamburg, died Nov. 29. She was 82. Born in Buffalo to the late Joseph and Margaret Meier, Mrs. Haas graduated from Holy Angels Academy and later earned a degree in psychology at Rosary Hill College, the precursor to Daemen College. She worked as a teacher, first at the St. Mark School in Buffalo and then for 20 years in the Hamburg-based Hopevale Union Free School District. She and Norman Haas were married in 1960 and have enjoyed 58 years together. Mrs. Haas served as an election inspector for 35 years. "She was proud of that," her husband said. She also enjoyed playing bridge, her husband added. In addition to her husband, she is survived by her children, Sally and Heidi Haas; grandchildren, Corinne Smith, Jayme Erxleben, Kelsey Braudaway and Chloe Yetts; sister, Margaret Ebinger; and three great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by a brother, Joseph Meier. Services were held Dec. 6 at SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church.

MARGARET E. FANCHER, WORKED AS LONGTIME FRONTIER TEACHER, ENJOYED GARDENING, PLAYING CARDS

Aug. 26, 1930 – Nov. 26, 2018



Margaret E. Fancher of Hamburg died Nov. 26. She was 88. Born in Salamanca to the late Harry and Violetta Shoup, she graduated from Falconer Middle/High School and went on to earn a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in elementary education from SUNY Buffalo State. She and the late Theodore Fancher married in August 1953 and were married for 62 years until his death in December 2015. They lived in Hamburg since 1961. She worked as a kindergarten teacher in the Frontier Central School District for more than 30 years. She was also a member of a senior group at the Village of Hamburg's Swim Center and enjoyed gardening and playing cards with friends. She is survived by her children, Sharon (Tony) Masterjohn, Eileen (Gregory) Giglia, Carol (Terry) Johnson, Michael (Carole) Fancher and Barbara (Scott) Davis; brother Charles (Karen); nine grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by her husband, Theodore Fancher; and siblings Robert and Richard Shoup and Katherine Luderman. Services were held Dec. 1 at SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church.

VIRGINIA V. SUIDA, LIVED IN EDEN MORE THAN 50 YEARS, WORSHIPED AT SS. PETER & PAUL

Dec. 23, 1928 – Dec. 3, 2018

Virginia V. Suida of Eden died Dec. 3. She was 89. Born in Lackawanna to the late Paul and Sophie Bartus, she attended Lackawanna High School. She married John L. Suida in August 1947. They were married for 71 years and lived in Eden since 1965. "They wanted to make that 70th year and they got an extra year in," said her son John Suida. "So, they were very happy about that." She held various part-time jobs but mostly was a homemaker, raising two sons, John and Kenneth. She was a parishioner at SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church. "She was just a beautiful wife and beautiful mother," her son John said. In addition to her husband, John L. Suida and children, John and Kenneth (Joan), she is survived by grandchildren, Mark (Cheryl) Suida and Kimberly (Joseph) Servantez; great-grandchildren, Samantha, Miranda, Jillian, Luke and Aubrey; and a sister, Sabina Sawicz. Services will be held at noon on Dec. 23 – which would have been her 90th birthday – at the St. Francis High School chapel.

NORMAN W. SHEA, WORKED FOR DECADES AT NATIONAL FUEL, WAS ACTIVE AT HAMBURG CHURCH

June 5, 1938 – Nov. 18, 2018


Norman W. "Bill" Shea of Hamburg died Nov. 18 after battling leukemia. He was 80. Born in Buffalo, he attended Grover Cleveland High School. He lived in Hamburg and worked at the National Fuel Gas Co. for 38 years, most recently as a debt collector. Shea married the former Marcia M. Berra in September 1966. They were married for 52 years. He enjoyed spicy food and working on puzzles, his wife said. He was also a member at St. Mary of the Lake Church and active in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. In addition to his wife, Marcia M. (Berra) Shea, he is survived by children, Christopher (Susan) Shea and Timothy (Kristin) Shea; grandchildren, Jennifer (Joel) Van Asdale, Robert (Lori) Duel and Caroline Shea; a great-grandchild Jordan Van Asdale. Services were held Nov. 25 at St. Mary of the Lake Church.

ANNE ELIZABETH NAGEL, EARNED MASTER'S DEGREE IN LIBRARY SCIENCES

March 27, 1981 – Nov. 25, 2018

Anne Elizabeth Nagle of Eden died Nov. 25 in Hamburg. She was 37. Born in Buffalo to Richard and Patricia Nagle, she attended Eden Central Schools and later attended Buffalo State College where she received a bachelor's degree in sociology and women's studies. She was also awarded a masters degree in library sciences from the University at Buffalo. In addition to her parents, she is survived by her brother Paul; sister-in-law Rose and niece Madelynn. Memorial services were held Dec. 1 at Lombardo Funeral Home in Orchard Park. Memorials may be given to the Eden Library or any not-for-profit animal shelter in the Western New York region.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Today

Antiques studies group: The Hamburg Antique Studies Group will hold meetings at 7:30 p.m. on the second Friday of the month at the Hamburg Community Center, 107 Prospect Ave. Kathy Hatem will host the program and attendees are asked to bring their Christmas collectibles and antiques and discuss the various items. Guests are welcome and light refreshments are served at the end of the presentation. For more information, email jonestuba@gmail.com.

Santa's workshop: Santa's workshop at Hamburg Village Square Plaza will run today through the end of the weekend before closing for the season. It will be open from 5 to 8 p.m. today, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday.

Live nativity: Destination Bethlehem, a live nativity, will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. tonight and tomorrow at Old Time Baptist Church, 5599 Camp Road, Hamburg. The story of Christmas will be told with live animals and actors and a beautiful set design during a 20-minute walk-through indoors. Guided tours begin every 10 minutes, starting at 6 p.m. both nights. Guests are invited to stay for light refreshments. For more information, call 649-4974 or visit online at www.destination-bethlehemwny.com.

Story time at library: Story Time Shook Up with Miss Laurie, geared toward children ages 2 to 5, will take place at 10:30 a.m. at the Hamburg Public Library, 102 Buffalo St. Registration is required. Call 649-4415 or stop by the desk.

Story/craft hour: Story hour with Miss Alice will feature stories and crafts ideal for children ages 3 to 5 at 11 a.m. at the North Collins Library, 2095 School St. Call 337-3211 for more information.

Story time in Eden: A toddler story time for children aged 2 will be held at 10:30 a.m. at the Eden Library, 2901 E. Church St. For more information, call 992-4028.

Preschool story time: Preschool story time for children aged 3 will be held at 11 a.m. at Eden Library, 2901 E Church St. For more information, call 992-4028.

Saturday

Reading dog program: A canine good citizen reading dog, Grimaldi, will be on staff from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays until Dec. 29 at the Boston Free Library, 9475 Boston State Road. Stop in and sign up for a session to read aloud to Grimaldi or register by calling 941-3516.

Holiday crafting: Representatives of Explore and More will host a holiday crafting program, Graham Cracker houses, starting at 11:30 a.m. at the Eden Library, 2901 E. Church St. Children can make a candy-decorated house. Advance registration is required by calling the library or stopping in to sign up. For more information, call 992-4028.

Reading Dog: Story time with Phoebe the Reading Dog will take place at 9:30 a.m. at the Hamburg Public Library, 102 Buffalo St. Visit and share a story with Phoebe, who is a therapy dog. Most programs require advance registration. Call 649-4415 or stop by the desk.

Sensory Saturday: A holiday edition of Sensory Saturday, open to all ages, will take place from 10 a.m. to noon at the Hamburg Public Library, 102 Buffalo St. The event provides children with a chance to explore, discover and create using the senses during hands-on activities to promote cognitive development. Registration is required. Call 649-4415 or stop by the desk.

Sunday

Christmas drama: The First Baptist Church of Hamburg will hold a 6 p.m. show, "Four Tickets to Christmas" at 120 Main St. For more information, email secretary@fbchamburg.com or call 649-3823.

High school holiday music: A holiday music celebration will be presented by the Hamburg School band, orchestra, chorus and guitar ensemble starting at 10:30 a.m. at Unitarian Universalist Church, 142 Union St. A coffee hour will follow the service. All are welcome.

Holiday cookie sale: Trinity Episcopal Church will hold its annual Holiday cookie sale from 8 a.m. to noon at 261 East Main St, Hamburg. All proceeds will be donated to the Trinity Fresh Produce Pantry, organized in cooperation with Operation Good Neighbor.

Sunday worship: Sunday morning worship at Faith United Church of Christ begins at 10:15 a.m. at 8651 Boston State Road, Boston. Also, the church has Sunday School classes available for

children ages 3-and-older from 9 to 10 a.m. For more information, call 941-3529 or visit www.faithunitedchurchucc.com.

Monday

Al-Anon Meeting: An Al-Anon meeting, Courage to Change, which is intended to help those whose lives have been touched by alcoholism, takes place at 7:30 p.m. each Monday at Hamburg Presbyterian Church, 105 Main St. Enter at the driveway side door and proceed to the basement.

Taxpayer group meeting: The Hamburg Taxpayer Association will be holding its December meeting at 7 p.m. at the Scranton Fire Hall. Enter through the back door. All residents are invited to attend and have their voices heard.

Tuesday

Cat benefit event: Ten Lives Club Cat Adoption Group will hold a Holiday Meowy Hour from 5 to 7:30 p.m. at Ernie Weber's Beef-n-Ale, 3167 South Park Ave., Buffalo. Admission is \$8 at the door and will include beef on week, chef salad and desserts with a portion of proceeds donated to Ten Lives Club. Cash bar will be available. There will be theme baskets and 50/50. For more information, visit www.tenlivesclub.com.

Wednesday

Caregivers program: Eden Dementia/Alzheimer's Respite program for caregivers will meet at the Eden United Methodist Church, 2820 E. Church St. The day's theme will be "Jingle Bell Rock" and Santa plans to make a visit. There will also be Christmas caroling, dog tricks by Sadie, crafts, bingo and lunch. For more information or reservations, call 992-4211.

Retirement/healthcare presentation: A presentation about retirement and healthcare will take place from 1 to 2:30 p.m. at St. Francis Park, 5229 South Park Ave., Hamburg. Sonja Jensen-Schell, a financial advisor from Edward Jones, will discuss how to keep retirement savings healthy and what steps can be taken to prepare for Medicare and long-term care costs. Light refreshments will be provided. Reservations are required by calling 649-1205 before Dec. 17.

Thursday

Blue Christmas service: The Eden United Methodist Church will host a Blue Christmas (Longest Night) service for those in the community grieving or struggling to experience the joy of the season at 7:30 p.m. at 2820 East Church St. All are welcome. For more information, call 992-4211 or email edenumcl@gmail.com

Next Saturday

Reading dog program: A canine good citizen reading dog, Grimaldi, will be on staff from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays until Dec. 29 at the Boston Free Library, 9475 Boston State Road. Stop in to sign up for a session to read aloud to Grimaldi or register by calling 941-3516.

Next Sunday

Christmas drama: The First Baptist Church of Hamburg, 120 Main St., will hold a 6 p.m. show, "Four Tickets to Christmas." For more information, email secretary@fbchamburg.com or call 649-3823.

Holiday sermon: John Snodgrass will present the sermon, Jolly Holiday, starting at 10:30 a.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 142 Union St. Religious education classes will perform. A holiday coffee hour will follow the service. All are welcome.

Christmas services: A Christmas service will be held at 7 p.m. at Southtowns Christian Center, 6619 Southwestern Blvd., Lake View. It will be a service for all ages to share Christmas stories from scripture and enjoy music. Services will be held in the morning at 8:30 a.m. and 10 a.m. and Generation Kids Sunday School will be at 10 a.m. For more information, visit www.sccministries.org or call 627-2183.

Sunday worship: Sunday morning worship at Faith United Church of Christ begins at 10:15 a.m. at 8651 Boston State Road, Boston. Also, the church has Sunday School classes available for children ages 3-and-older from 9 to 10 a.m. For more information, call 941-3529 or visit www.faithunitedchurchucc.com.

Lighting of the Way: Luminary supplies for the Lighting of the Way in the Village of Hamburg will be available at Tops on South Park Avenue from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Lighting of the luminaries will take place on Christmas Eve.

Historic marker unveiled in Angola

By Leslie Logan
SUN CONTRIBUTOR

Friends of the Village of Angola and the Evans Historical Society unveiled an historic marker last week commemorating the tragic "Angola Horror" train wreck that rocked the village on December 18, 1867.

The marker presentation was held in a somber ceremony on Dec. 5 at the Southwick House on Mill St., which was used as a makeshift hospital for the dozens of passengers that were injured in the wake of the devastating derailment. The date was selected to also mark the International Day of Volunteerism – a day that recognizes community volunteers committed to making their communities more resilient in the face of disasters and stress.

The new marker pays tribute to the unsung local heroes who acted as first responders to the fiery accident where 49 people lost their lives. It depicts a pair of interlocking helping hands.

Joan Houston, Angola village historian, reflected on the incident and its impact on the community during Mon-



Contributed photo

The marker was unveiled at the Southwick House.

day's Village Board meeting. "I can't imagine what that first Christmas was like for those rescuers. It was such a grisly scene, no one probably wanted to revisit it for years after," said Houston.

According to historical documents, Angola residents sprang into action after the eastbound Lake Shore Railway Express went off the tracks as it crossed the 40-foot wooden trestle bridge over Big Sister Creek, east of the village.

Passenger cars at the time were made of wood, heated by coal-fired stoves and lit by kerosene lamps. The last two passenger cars plummeted

into the frozen creek below and immediately burst into flames. Angola citizens did all they could in response, carrying the dead, badly burned and injured from the ravine. The railway disaster deeply affected the community, hitting just a week before Christmas, historians say.

Dr. Romaine J. Curtiss, an Angola physician who served as a Union surgeon during the Civil War, took charge of the dead and wounded. Curtiss treated the critically wounded and enlisted neighbors to receive them. Josiah Southwick's home became a triage unit.

The New York Times gave an account of the community's efforts, writing, "(P)ersons were lying in beds and upon the floor in almost every room in the house, and not only Mr. Southwick's family, but a number of the neighbors...were kindly and most patiently doing all in their power to assuage their pain and make them comfortable."

Officials from The Friends of the Village of Angola say they have maintained a commitment to keeping the story alive to recognize the tragic history and the valiant rescue efforts that put Angola

on the map. The accident was one of the deadliest train wrecks of the times. In its aftermath, new train safety regulations were enacted putting an end to wooden passenger cars, and established improved braking mechanisms.

In 2016, 150 years after the accident, a burial marker was erected at Forest Lawn Cemetery where some 20 unidentified victims were buried in a mass grave. The Friends of the Village of Angola raised the money for the cemetery monument and ensures that a wreath is placed there annually on Dec. 18.

Officials say a garden is also being planned in the village as a focal point to pay tribute to Angola's first responders, past and present.

"The marker helps to educate the public about the inspiring, sad-but-true story of a devastating incident in the village's history," said Houston. "What we hope is remembered is how the villagers stepped up, stood together, hands stretched out, to help people in desperate need. It speaks volumes to the character of the community. We need much more of that in the world today."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Many to thank for success of Conor Long Bulldog Dash

Dear editor:
I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who helped support this year's Bulldog Dash. The support and participation was overwhelming.

More than 1,000 runners and walkers endured a very rainy day to show support for a young man who was truly loved and is dearly missed. Conor Long graduated from Hamburg High School in June of 2017. Among his many accomplishments, he was involved in indoor track, served as the president of student government, coordinated the most successful Bald for Bucks cancer fundraiser in Hamburg history and was the first student president of the Hamburg High School Health Science Academy.

He was an amazing young man and instrumental in starting the Bulldog Dash, an annual 5K fun run/walk through the village of Hamburg. His energizing passion and dedication to helping other people was contagious, and people were inspired and united by his spirit. A natural leader, Conor engaged an army of volunteers and created a fun and healthy community wide race/walk. A Hamburg Bulldog to the core, Conor ran the entire race in the school mascot costume, high fiving and spreading smiles and encouragement along the way.

Tragically, Conor died this summer on a hiking trip to Zoar Valley. This year's Bulldog Dash was a celebration of his life. He showed us that one person really can make a difference – we are all of value, all deserving of love, and we are all much stronger when we work together to support one another.

The Hamburg Health Science Academy, along with the Hamburg Booster Club, and Unyts are very grateful for all the time and donations from our community. Your support is truly appreciated.

Also, on behalf of the Hamburg Health Science Academy, the Hamburg Bulldog Booster Club, and Unyts, I would like to send a very special thank you to the Long and Ballowe families. While dealing with the aftermath of a tragedy no family should ever face, you worked hard to carry on Conor's dream and make the race a reality. It is easy to see where Conor learned about hard work and the importance of caring for others. Thank you for helping us create an amazing

event to honor Conor.

One last thank you to everyone for the donations sent in or the time spent volunteering. The outpouring of love for Conor made the race a huge success. We look forward to having this be an annual event in his honor. We hope to see everyone at next year's Conor Long Bulldog Dash.

Sally Couzens
Hamburg Health Science Academy director

Highway Dept. superintendent asks to be left in charge of town's B&G

Dear editor;
I read with interest the Nov. 2 Hamburg Sun article wherein certain board members were considering appointing someone to run the Town of Hamburg's Buildings & Grounds Department at \$25,000 per year.

This is an ill-conceived idea that will negatively impact delivery of services to residents and is counter-productive to tax cutting efforts by the town supervisor. Historically, the elected highway superintendent has been appointed to manage B&G for practical reasons including ensuring thorough and efficient removal of snow and ice. Creation of a separate position to run B&G will add an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy as well as create potential conflicts when collaboration is most critical during emergencies and the winter season.

As the highway superintendent, the safety of residents is my top priority, and managing B&G affords me the necessary flexibility to move personnel around

in times of need. I trust the Town Board shares in my desire to help ensure the safety of residents by keeping B&G under the re-

sponsibility of the highway superintendent.

Ted Casey
Highway Superintendent

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COMMUNITY IN PHOTOS

Taking a ride on the Santa Express



Fire Man Michael Shears readies to leave aboard The Santa Express at the depot in Hamburg for the holiday train ride from Hamburg on Saturday. Train rides were also Sunday.



Photos by John Normile / Special to The Sun
Jade Andruszko gives her ticket to conductors Ray Kolaso, right, and Mike Connors to board The Santa Express at the depot in Hamburg for Holiday Train ride.



Mrs. Claus makes an appearance during the train ride on The Santa Express.



The Kearns family, Mike, Patrick, Emmett, and Dara are ready to enjoy the ride Saturday on The Santa Express.



Nathan Minotti looks out the window on The Santa Express.



Benjamin Dascomb and mom Sarah Bates look at Toy trains at the depot in Hamburg.



Casey Gruberi enjoys the ride on The Santa Express.



Pictured from left, Audrey, Kristen (mom), and Nora Maloney board The Santa Express at the depot in Hamburg on Saturday.

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