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Gaughan and supporters force vote on downsizing West Seneca Town Board

Issue will be on the ballot in November

By Helen Jones NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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Surrounded by volunteers wearing “gold medals” to celebrate their victory, regionalism advocate Kevin Gaughan announced Tuesday night that he and volunteers had collected enough petition signatures to force a vote on reducing the size of the West Seneca Town Board.

“Through the remarkable efforts of these heroic citizens, this November West Seneca residents will decide for themselves the shape and size of their government,” Gaughan said.

The petition drive, which began about five weeks ago, resulted in the collection of 4,327 signatures, more than five times the number required by law to put the issue on the ballot in November, he said.

Gaughan said the petition signatures, which account for about 10 percent of the town’s population, would be presented to the West Seneca Town Clerk today and will result in the issue being placed on the ballot as a proposition in November.

“This will be the first time in the history of Erie County that citizens used their right to demand change,” he said.

Over the past year Gaughan has taken the issue on the road, visiting Erie County’s 25 towns, 16 villages, and three cities, and urging them to eliminate two elected positions. The Village of Lancaster adopted Gaughan’s plan and is expected to ratify it in a November referendum, while the Village of North Collins began steps to dissolve. Even the Erie County Legislature is considering his proposal to reduce its size from 15 to nine members, Gaughan said.

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Using a state law Gaughan discovered that permits citizens to petition government to change when it “refuses to do so on its own,” about 35 volunteers went door to door throughout West Seneca. Tuesday they gathered in the home of Debbie and Mike Lafferty in West Seneca to hear the results and to celebrate.

Erin Grosstephan, who personally collected more than 400 signatures, said she was relieved and proud.

“Everyone pulled together,” she said. “It’s an amazing feeling.”

But not everyone agrees on the need for change. West Seneca Councilman Vincent Graber Jr., who opposed the idea when it was brought to the Town Board for consideration in June, said Tuesday that reducing the board from five to three members would be a mistake.

“I’m glad this will finally be answered,” he said. But he noted that three board members would be more prone to manipulation and would ultimately provide less representation.

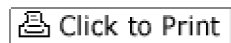
“You’d be losing two voices,” he said.

He also said if the reason for the reduction was the cost of government, taxpayers would be saving only about 5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

hjones@buffnews.com

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