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Villagers' politeness greets the downsizer

Orchard Park 11thon Gaughan's trail

By Elmer Ploetz

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Kevin P. Gaughan made his foray into Orchard Park on Monday night, taking his message of downsizing government bodies into the village that some of his disciples had recommended for disbanding.

Things couldn't have been more polite as Gaughan ran through his 35-minute presentation, complete with Jimmy Stewart film clips, even though none of the Village Board members appeared receptive to Gaughan's message that the number of elected officials in Erie County — 439 — was helping strangle the region.

"We have to be a little more realistic and truth-telling to ourselves," Gaughan said.

When he asked for a show of hands afterward, a majority of the audience raised their hands in support of Gaughan's proposals.

Village Attorney John C. Bailey simply raised his hand when Gaughan asked whether anybody thought he was crazy.

"Yeah, I think he's nuts," Bailey said good-naturedly after the meeting.

The patter has become somewhat routine by now, with Gaughan reaching site No. 11 on his proposed tour of all of the county's municipalities. Gaughan uses an Al Gore-like slide show, with plenty of numbers to support his argument.

But the village officials begged to differ. They had taken offense when a government-efficiency task force, inspired by Gaughan's efforts and encouraged by Town Supervisor Mary Travers Murphy, suggested last year that the village should be merged with the town.

Mayor John B. Wilson suggested that some of the audience members who left after Gaughan finished should have stayed a little longer to hear the board's response.



“One of the women who spoke questioned the board’s [approach to] change, with reduction and attrition,” he said. “If you look back to the early to middle ’90s, our Department of Public Works had about 12 people. Now we’re staffed by six, and we’re getting the job done equally well.

“ ‘Business as usual,’ as she was talking about, is something that includes forward-moving ideas that the village takes to heart. If you had looked at Mr. Gaughan’s presentation, there was a gentleman — Jimmy Stewart — doing what this board does and what I do — we do represent our village residents.”

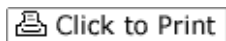
Trustee Francis T. Hogenkamp said that it would be a mistake to think of board seats such as those in the village as jobs.

“These are not jobs; these are almost volunteer from the number of hours we put in,” Hogenkamp said. “Nobody on the board depends on their salary here to sustain them.”

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