



Town of Franklin

May 2003 Newsletter

Volume II, Issue 5

May 2003

Town of Franklin

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WEB PAGE

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TOWN OFFICIALS

Town Supervisor

Mary Ellen Keith

Deputy Supervisor

Gene Goff

Town Councilmen

Timothy Goff

Walter Kretser

Janet Ordway

Town Justice

Roger Symonds

Highway Superintendent

Donald Vorrath

Deputy Highway Supt.

Eric Merrill

Town Clerk/Tax Collector

Lauren LeFebvre

Attorney for the Town

Edward Murphy

Assessor

Douglas Tichenor

483-0188

Code Enforcement Officer

Edward Lagree

891-5976

TOWN BOARD MEETINGS

Regular town board meetings are held the second Monday of each month at the Franklin Town Hall. The meetings are open to the public.

The next regular meeting will be held Monday, June 9, 2003, at 7:00 p.m.

Check the town Website for up-to-date information on upcoming town events and meetings, minutes of past meetings, and agendas for upcoming meetings, plus lots of other information on the Town of Franklin. ❖

From the Supervisor

by **Mary Ellen Keith**

I want to thank all of the hard workers who came to the town highway litter clean-up day. Groups went up and down as many town roads as we could do.

Workers included Alan, Robin, Lauren, and Taylor Oliver, Maryssa Romeo, Dalton Bailey, Tim and Brian Besaw, Jeff, Autumn, and Veronica LeFebvre, Jordan Law, Sue Grenier and a friend, Frank Karl, and several of our town

officials. Don Vorrath had one of the highway trucks parked at the town hall for loading the collected bags and then had the garbage delivered to the dump. Thanks, too, to the people who picked up and left bags for our workers to pick up.

Garbage Law Enforcement

Residents are reminded about the local garbage law passed this winter. Complaints of improperly stored

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Aspen Group Camp a Go

Residents Invited to Barbecue

The Aspen Group is inviting Town of Franklin residents to a barbecue at the site of their new camp for troubled teens on the Paul Smith's College property in Onchiota.

On Saturday, June 14, representatives from Aspen Group and Dr. George Miller of Paul Smith's College will be serving a lunch on the property to anyone who would like to visit the site and learn more about the camp, from 12:00 noon until 1:30 p.m. They will be happy to answer any questions or to address concerns about their program.

The official name of the local group is Adirondack Leadership Expeditions, according to executive director Jim Glaeser. Staff has been hired, the lease with Paul Smith's College signed, and office space rented in Saranac Lake. If all goes as planned, the first campers should be packing their gear and heading out into the wild this summer.

Glaeser would like to meet with residents of the Town of Franklin, and especially the Onchiota neighbors, to discuss his program and he organized the open house with Town of Franklin Supervisor Mary Ellen Keith.

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MEMORIAL DAY YARD SALE!

Onchiota is hosting a multi-stop Memorial Day weekend yard sale.

The sale will be Saturday May 24 and Sunday, May 25, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.



Each participating home will have a number, and maps will be available.

Follow signs and pick up a map at House #1 to begin shopping.

ROAD SAFETY

With winter over, the Town of Franklin Highway Department is out on the roads working – raking, brooming, trimming the sides of the roads. Most of these jobs involve slow moving equipment.

Drivers are reminded to use caution when coming up on the signs that work is being done up ahead. A accident occurred on the Kushaqua-

Mud Pond Road this spring when a driver didn't see the Sweepster through the dust and drove into the back of the Sweepster broom. Fortunately, there were no injuries and only minor damage was done to the Sweepster.

Roadwork will be on-going throughout the summer. Please – take care, for your safety and for the safety of the workers. ❖

Celebration Committee

The Celebration Committee says "Thanks!" to everyone for all the generous donations of baked goods, salads, breads, and casseroles for their May food sale fundraiser. Money collected will go to the next celebration event: the second annual Halloween Haunted House.

Margaret Turnbull won the 50/50 drawing; Dora Schuller won the Mother's Day cake (donated by Sue Muzzy), and Lauren LeFebvre won Avon products (donated by Janet Ordway).

Donations are being collected for raffle tickets for a crocheted afghan made and donated by Margaret Carolyn Cochran. Those tickets will be available throughout the summer and fall, and the drawing is scheduled for Halloween.

Another very special thank you goes

to Shirley Mundy from the Franklin County Division for Youth in Malone. Mundy came for a visit to the Franklin Town Hall with representatives from the Town of Franklin's various fund-raising committees – Celebration, Scholarship, Recreation, Cemetery, and Food Pantry.

According to Scholarship Committee member Lorrie Rumble, "We're all worn out with fundraising and were desperate for new ideas. Shirley is probably the most enthusiastic and creative fundraiser on earth."

With new ideas and renewed energy, several of the committee fundraisers have begun plotting future events. "We hope you will see more than the same old food sales, bottle drives, and dinners," Janet Ordway told the town board and visitors at the last board meeting. ❖

From the Supervisor

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garbage can be made to the town code officer, Ed Lagree. The resident against whom a complaint has been made will be notified.

The offender will have an opportunity to contest the complaint to the board, but if the situation meets the law's definition of a garbage problem, he will be required to clean it up. If it is not taken care of, the town will arrange to have the garbage picked up and taken to the dump, and all costs will be added to the landowner's following year's tax bill.

Abandoned Vehicle Pick Up

The town is arranging for free pick up of abandoned and junk cars in the town. If you have a car to remove from your property, call me at the town hall at 891-2189.

If I'm not there, leave a message. We will make arrangements to have the vehicle picked up and towed away.

Consequences

It's very discouraging that people are using our back roads as dumps. It's not kids who are doing the dumping – sofas, tires, household items and such – but it's kids who are doing the cleaning up.

I recently talked with Town Justice Roger Symonds. I would like to see more policing of dumping, and I also would like to see anyone arrested to be given community service. I know exactly what I will have them do: They will be required to go up and down roads in town to clean up the garbage dumped by others! ❖

Senior Citizens Trip June 18

The 55+ Senior Club will be leaving the Vermontville Town Hall at 8:00 a.m. on June 18 for this year's annual trip to Vermont.

The trip will include a visit to the Maritime Museum and to the Wild Birds of Vermont Museum, and then a stop to eat at the Dog Sled Tavern.

The Wild Birds Museum has walking trails and woodcarvings of wild birds. On the day of their trip, the woodcarver will be at the museum to meet visitors.

Seniors may be asked to pay for part of their meal, but other than that the club will cover all costs. All seniors in the Town of Franklin are invited to join the

group. If you are interested in coming along and are not already signed up, call Margaret Turnbull at 891-2656. They would love to have you come along! ❖

Address Change Reminder

A reminder: You need to notify all state and local agencies, utilities, friends, family, etc., of your new E911 address (and don't forget your kids' school, too). Add the posting of the new number of your property on your home or mailbox to your list of spring jobs. ❖

TOWN CALENDAR

Sat. and Sun., May 23 and 24 – Onchiota Yard Sale, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
 Tues., May 27 - 55+ Seniors Meeting and Pot Luck Supper, 6:30 p.m.
 Wed., May 28 – Special Board Meeting, 7:00 p.m.
 Tues., June 3 – Assessment Grievance Day, 5:00 – 9:00 p.m., Town Hall
 Mon., June 9 – Regular Town Board Meeting, 7:00 p.m.
 Mon., June 9 – Rabies Clinic, 7:00 – 8:00 p.m., Town Garage
 Wed., June 11 – Citizens Building Use Committee meeting, 7:00 p.m.
 Sat., June 14 – Aspen Group barbecue, Onchiota, 12:00 – 1:30 p.m.
 Wed., June 18 – Senior trip to Vermont, leaving Town Hall at 8:00 a.m.

Assessment Grievance Day June 3

You feel your assessment was raised far more than your property's actual value. You've had a change of status – sold part of your property, took down an old garage – and it wasn't reflected in your assessment notice. Or maybe your assessment is too high compared to your neighbors, or you didn't get an exemption you feel you're entitled to.

You *meant* to get around to calling the town hall to set up an appointment with Town Assessor Doug Tichenor, but time goes by and some things just don't get done. Don't despair. You have another opportunity to do something about your assessment.

The Town of Franklin Board of Assessment Review (BOAR) will hold Grievance Day at the Franklin Town Hall on Tuesday, June 3, from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

If you choose to grieve your assessment, you do not have to be present on Grievance Day. However, you do have to fill out and sign a Grievance Form and

it must be received at the town hall by the time the board meets. You can pick up a form at the town hall, or one can be mailed to you. You may also want to ask for a copy of a publication from the New York State Board of Real Property called "A Taxpayer's Guide: How to File a Complaint on Your Assessment." You even can pick up a form on Grievance Day and fill it out at the hearing.

The BOAR is made up of Jean Baltzly, Katrine Kretser, Millie Vorrath, Sandy Oliver, and Roland LaPier.

Baltzly advises that there are a few things to remember to do as you prepare your grievance:

- state your reason for requesting a change in your assessment,
- indicate the amount you feel your assessment should be,
- bring along back up information for the board – why your assessment should be lowered,
- sign the form.

Remember: the presumption is that

the assessor is correct, so you must prove that he is wrong. If you have questions or problems filling out the form, the board can help you at the hearing. However, they are not required to do your research for you. They will consider only the facts you bring to them.

Their decision on your claim probably will not be made at the hearing. You will be notified by mail of the board's decision within 21 days after Grievance Day.

Try to keep in mind: No one wants you to pay more in taxes than your fair share, and that includes Assessor Tichenor as well as the BOAR members. Don't be intimidated by the process.

And what if you have your hearing on Grievance Day and still are not happy with your assessment? You have one more opportunity to appeal the decision through Small Claims Assessment Review within 30 days after July 1, when the final assessment roll is filed. Contact Tichenor or the town clerk for information on small claims. ❖

Cemeteries in Need of Attention

Ted Buchanan, Life Scout from Troop 12 in Gabriels, took a first step in his Eagle Scout project by asking permission from the Town Board to pursue upgrading of the old Franklin Falls Cemetery, located on the Franklin Falls Road at the bottom of the climb up towards the Whiteface toll house. Buchanan's proposal is to "clean it up and give it a face lift," including straightening up the stones, leveling the grounds, and trimming trees and surrounding growth. Work also will be done on the entrance, parking lot, and turn around, and new signage and fencing are planned.

The board gave Buchanan permission to begin his project. His first phase will be to research ownership and get landowner permission. The project then will need to be approved by the Eagle Scouts.

Old Union Cemetery

With the discussion of the Franklin Falls Cemetery project, problems of the

old Union Cemetery in Franklin Falls were brought up. William and Galina Lawlor, neighbors of the cemetery, reported that again this winter snowmobilers used the cemetery as a "playground". They reported that their attempts to ask the snowmobilers to leave were met with rude behavior.

"It was awful," Mrs. Lawlor said. The Lawlors then described damage done to the grounds and gravestones.

The old Union Cemetery has been neglected for many years. Last fall, the Town of Franklin Cemetery Committee began making its way through a tangle of legalities to find a long-term plan to remedy the situation.

In question is ownership of the property, and that is further complicated by the fact that while a part of it is located in the Town of Franklin, most of the property is in the Town of St. Armand in Essex County.

Last summer, town residents Helen Arnold and Richard Arnold joined with Town Supervisor Mary Ellen Keith and Cemetery Committee members Tim Goff and Vivian Manny to begin untangling the cemetery's confusing past to begin a clear future. As a start, they were successful in tracking down and securing the old cemetery records.

Because of the familiarity with the problems and neglect at the Union Cemetery, the Lawlors are more than pleased that Ted Buchanan will tackle the Franklin Falls Cemetery so that property, at least, will be taken care of. "Thank you, young man," Mr. Lawlor said.

Buchanan will report back to the board on his progress.

Flags for Memorial Day

The Cemetery Committee reports that new flags for the cemeteries have been purchased and they will be in the cemeteries in time for Memorial Day. ❖

Looking to Fill Ethics Board Positions

The search is on for three Town of Franklin residents to make up a town Ethics Board.

The board was created with the passage of the Town of Franklin Code of Ethics. The role of the Ethics Board will be to advise town officials and employees and to hear complaints against them.

The Attorney for the Town Ed Murphy drafted the town's document. It covers conflicts of interest, acceptance of gifts, nepotism, political solicitation, and other issues of ethical behavior.

"The purpose is to provide standards for defining ethical behavior," Murphy said. "With clear guidelines, potential ethical conflicts can be identified early and avoided."

Town officials and employees, whether paid, elected, appointed, or volunteer, are required to adhere to the code. Highway department employee union issues would not fall under the board's oversight.

The first of the board's functions would be to provide advisory services. Any official or employee with a potential ethics matter would need to give to the Ethics Board a written disclosure. The board would render an opinion as to whether or not the situation violates the code. The board could require person involved to recuse himself from acting on a matter or, in some circumstances, they could grant waivers.

The other duty of the board will be to hear citizen complaints against town officials.

When there is a complaint, the problem would be brought to the Ethics Board. After weighing the charges, the board can decide to dismiss the complaint. However, if they find that there was questionable behavior, the board could choose to hold a hearing to make a determination whether there was wrongdoing. If a violation of the code is determined, the Ethics Board would then rec-

ommend disciplinary action to the town board.

The qualifications to serve on the board are:

--members must be residents of the town,

--must "by temperament and experience" be able to carry out the duties and responsibilities, and

--may not be an officer or employee of the town.

There is no compensation, although members "may be reimbursed for reasonable and necessary expenses." The three-year terms will be staggered so that in any one year no more than one new member needs to be assigned.

Any resident who fits the qualifications and is interested in serving on the Ethics Board should contact Supervisor Mary Ellen Keith or any board member. "I would like to see people from different parts of town serve on this board," Keith said. ❖

Board hears neighborhood concerns

Twice this month residents have come to the town board asking for help with problems in their neighborhoods.

At the regular board meeting in May, Goldsmith Road residents asked for monitoring of four-wheelers who use the road and campers who hold parties on property along the road.

According to the residents, the work the Town Highway Department does to grade and level the road is undone on weekends as it gets rutted and made a mess by riders out on four-wheelers. The concern about the campers involves campfires that are left smoldering and burning after weekenders are done partying.

Local New York State Troopers and the DEC will be notified and requested to monitor the road for future problems. Residents who witness problems on the road are advised to report what they see, and when, to Town Supervisor Mary Ellen Keith. Any other helpful information should also be passed along.

After the May town clean up day, another resident came to the board about

the Bigelow Road. Karrie Peck, who with her husband, Robert, and son, Tyler, worked on the Saturday town highway litter clean up, was upset at the amount of dumping being done down that road. With the bridge out, she asked if the board would consider closing the road to cars.

"There is no reason to go down the road - it doesn't go anywhere," she said. The highway department recently had to clean out building debris dumped there; Peck reported they found enough furniture for a whole living room dumped at another spot.

On the advice from Attorney for the Town Ed Murphy, the board will look into temporarily closing the road and blocking traffic, and to let the state police and DEC know of the problem.

A long-term plan will be to consider replacing the bridge with a narrow walking bridge that would allow hikers, bicyclers, and snowmobilers to cross. By blocking cars and trucks and increasing recreational use, dumping will be discouraged. ❖

Building Use Committee Presentation

The Citizen Committee studying future of needs for town facilities met with the Franklin Town Board on May 20.

Frank Karl, chairman of the committee, explained to the board that the next steps forward will require guidance from them as to whether or not they agree with the committee's work to date.

Members of the board received a Statement of Need drafted by the committee, summary of work done to date, a proposed layout for a new town hall, and cost estimates.

Board members will review the materials and will hold another public meeting with the committee on Wednesday, May 28, at 7:00 p.m.

If the board and town residents decide to go ahead with new town hall facilities, the next decision will be whether a new town hall should be built at the Kate Mt. Recreational Park or the current town hall should be renovated and expanded.

Residents are invited to the meeting and are encouraged to participate in the decisions. ❖

Highway Superintendent's Report

by Donald Vorrath

Your Town of Franklin Highway Department has been busy and with varied jobs. Projects either in process or completed include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Broomed all town roads and most of the intersections. Tow-behind sweepster is used on roadways and tractor broom is needed on the intersections.

2. In a reciprocal agreement with the Town of Brighton, we lent the Sweepster and borrowed the motor grader.

3. Began and are continuing grading the Plains Road. Time is limited, as Brighton needs the grader for their dirt road work to clean up winter's sand and rutting. Because of the versatile use of this type of machinery, we have recommended to the board that it is imperative that the town set aside resources and commit to securing a motor grader.

4. Repaired, but not yet completed, a washout on Tyler Road. Crusher run fill and ditching was required.

5. Three tandems are now ready for summer operation. The single axle will be undressed soon.

6. The highway department hosted a special town board meeting at the garage facilities.

7. Took delivery of a tow-behind York rake, assembled it, and began raking dirt roads. French and Goldsmith Roads were started. This will be a continuing operation.

8. Started some brush clearing on Thatcherville Road.

9. Removed scrap metal from both garage areas and on the "ridge" (site of the old dump). Will continue this process when time permits. Monies attained are used for kitchen supplies and appliances, and the department purchased the first year service for a water cooler. It is our endeavor to have our highway workplaces clean, safe, and representative of our town. Some residents have favorably commented on this change.

10. Continued routine maintenance, including replacing rake tines and broom brushes.

11. Finished grading Onchiota section of Oregon Plains Road and Kushaquamud Pond Road for resurfacing. Extracted 146 tandem loads of fill, delivered

to nearby residents.

12. Participated again with the high school BOCES program. Intern Todd Brown of Sugarbush worked with the highway employees four days a week, four hours a day, for the month of May, learning about the operation of a mechanized garage. At the end of the school year, he will be employed by the highway department for the summer.

13. Finished painting the '95 Ford dump truck.

14. Although the final report following the town-wide assessment by the New York State Department of Municipal Affairs found that a full audit of the town was not called for, there were several recommendations to the town, some of which involve the highway department. We have been meeting with the town board and some items have already been taken care of. Many of the issues will need to be addressed by the board with the highway employees' union business agent. A report on the assessment by the board's highway committee is

scheduled to be presented at the June board meeting.

And finally: Cooperation.

More than ever before, your highway department interacts with many other facets of town operation that are not really obligations and/or responsibilities set forth by highway law. Some include the recent paving of the entrance to the Union Cemetery in Vermontville, picking up roadside construction debris on Bigelow Road, helping with town-wide trash day, delivering crusher run for the driveway entrance at Kate Mt. Recreation Park, helping with unloading at the food pantry, participating with the BOCES programs, assisting with three Eagle Scout projects, and digging trenches and creating dirt berms to prevent illegal dumping on Rock Street.

None of these projects were charged to the town general fund accounts (i.e., personnel, equipment, and fuel), which, in fact, they could be. These cooperative endeavors were accomplished with a spirit of community pride. ❖

Senior Citizen News

Senior citizens in New York State have their work cut out for them in saving programs for the aging from the axe in the state budget.

Recently, the local Meals on Wheels program was endangered by Governor Pataki's budget for 2004.

Roland LaPier, Town of Franklin resident who serves on the Board of Directors of the Association of Senior Citizens, informed the town board at the May 12 board meeting that Pataki's budget cut funding to the RSVP program, which provides funding for mileage for volunteers who deliver Meals on Wheels to five residents in the Town of Franklin.

According to Margaret Dietz of the Franklin County Office for the Aging in Malone the funding finally was restored – at least for now. Dietz said that with the initial loss of state support, fundraising by the Saranac Lake Adult Center covered the Meals on Wheels program, but they would not have been able to

continue the funding indefinitely.

LaPier also reported that the association is concerned about the limited transportation available to seniors. Currently Franklin seniors only have a bus provided once a month by Saranac Lake Adult Center that travels to Plattsburgh. If they want to ride, they call ahead and have the bus stop to pick them up.

Providing transportation is difficult for the local organizations whose funding is provided by the counties. There are technicalities about using funding in one county to transport passengers to another county.

These days vigilance is needed to ensure that important programs, particularly for children, for education, and for seniors, don't get dropped from budgets by lawmakers in Albany.

We need people like LaPier to help us stay informed and to work on our behalf to fight budget cuts that are unfairly weighted against programs important to our town residents. ❖

Procurement Policy Revisited

This winter, the Town Board requested the New York State Comptroller's Department of Municipal Affairs to do a study of the town. One of the examiner's recommendations to the town was revision of the Procurement Policy.

When the policy recently was updated, the amounts at which approvals for expenditures needed to be approval were lowered, requiring any expenditure over \$100 to have signed approval by the town supervisor or by a member of the board. The Comptroller's Department recommended that the level be raised be raised to \$500.

Some board members didn't agree. "We see a lot of problems with purchases

under \$500," Councilman Walt Kretser said. "There is a lot that we will say no to." As a compromise, Kretser asked the board to consider a level of \$250.

Kretser and Councilman Gene Goff serve on the Highway Committee, the liaison between the board and the town highway department. As the board entered into a lengthy discussion of highway department expenditures, Goff said, "I don't think we should target one department. This is a town-wide policy," but the conversation continued with no doubt that one department was on their minds.

As the discussion continued, Attorney for the Town Ed Murphy interjected,

"Keep in mind, this isn't meant to root out all problems. It is to keep a check on prices."

Conceding that there will be increased paperwork, and that there could be problems in finding someone to approve purchases at times, the board decided to pass a resolution that purchases between \$250 and \$500 will require approval.

And with that, the board concluded, the policy will be strictly enforced. "We will set up a system" for employees "to get in touch with the board and to keep paperwork," Goff concluded. "Purchase orders will need to be signed in every case. Memos will go out to all department heads."❖

Onchiota Camp to Open

(Continued from page 1)

This summer's program has been cleared with the New York State Department of Health, according to Cindy Garso of North Woods Engineering in Saranac Lake, who has been working on behalf of the Aspen Group. "This summer's program has not been deemed a camp because there will be no home base. Kids will be out on the trails and in the woods the whole time," Garso said.

Staff hired for the summer include at least one local person.

The group is currently getting final plans ready for their year-round program. Building will begin on the Onchiota property later this summer to be ready this fall. At that point they will officially become a group camp and will have all DOH approvals.

Garso said that all of their programs nation-wide have safety plans that exceed New York State's requirements. Their biggest hurdle came with New York State's requirement that a medical director be on site twenty-four hours a day,

which they will need to work into their Onchiota plan. Also, the Department of Environmental Conservation has required that they be given detailed plans of where the campers will be at all times.

Glaeser has moved to the area with his wife and children and they are looking for a home. Other staff will be relocating as well. "We're all moving here and we're all ultimately going to be part of the community in all ways," Glaeser said.❖

Your Town Newsletter

The Town of Franklin Newsletter is provided by the town board to keep you up to date, month-to-month, on issues facing the town. The newsletter carries lengthy summaries of business conducted at each of the board meetings and of the on-going work of board committees. The newsletter also keeps you up to date on community events.

The goal is to give you thorough information on issues and directions before as well as after decisions are made and actions taken, keeping you informed and encouraging your participation.

Every month's issues are available at Gene's Grocery and at the town hall in Vermontville, and at Norman's General Store and the Bloomin' Market in Bloomingdale. Copies also are mailed out by request by calling the town hall (518-891-2189) or writing (Town of Franklin, P.O. Box 205, Vermontville, NY 12989). The newsletters also are on line at the town website at www.townoffranklin.com.

The newsletter is put together by Lorrie Rumble. Contributions to the newsletter are welcomed, as are comments and suggestions. Rumble is available at the above telephone number and address, or by e-mail (tofl@northnet.com). ❖