

School district budget proposals win voter approval

Niagara County voters mimic state trend; Lew-Port, NW, NF, NT & Wilson budgets all pass

BY TERRY DUFFY

Editor-in-Chief

Niagara County residents joined with voters from across the state in ratifying proposed school budgets and electing board of education members for 2024-25 on Tuesday.

Recapping unofficial voting from select Niagara County school districts:

•Lewiston-Porter Central School District voters approved the district's proposed \$54,651,119 budget by a count of 624 in favor to 242 opposed. The measure reflects a 2.12% increase in real property taxes over last year. Lew-Port voters also approved proposition No. 2, the district's \$11.15 million Capital improvement plan by a count of 609-240.

On the Lew-Port Board of Education, elected were Sara Ohanessian (547 votes) and Tessa Connelly (530), to fill the two open, at-large seats for a three-year term. Steven J. Tarnowski finished third (446).

•In Niagara Wheatfield, the district's \$87,072,229 budget was approved 624 to 277. It brings a calculated tax levy of 3.08%, which, along with various district reserve

account transfers, will go to cover NW's \$319,577 reduction in approved state aid for 2024-25.

Voters also approved proposition No. 2 (671 to 277). The measure provides for spending \$810,000 in reserve funds to purchase school buses. Proposition No. 3, to spend up to \$200,000 in reserve funds to purchase technology equipment, also was approved (694-203).

On the school board, top vote-getters for the three open seats were: Richard Siriani (607), Craig Guiliani (542), Wendy Cox (502) and Steve Sabo (487).

•In the City of Niagara Falls, the district's proposed \$190,992,049 budget was approved (1,507 to 280). Winning election for the two open seats on the Board of Education were Nicholas Vilardo (866) and Bradley McLeod (842). Just behind were Jerry Pulero (751), Carlton Cain (576) and Portland Jackson (416).

•In the City of North Tonawanda, the district's \$83.5 million budget was approved (447-117). Proposition No. 2, providing for \$39.9 million in capital improvements, was

also approved (443-119).

On the NT Board of Education, for three open seats, Krista Vince Garland was the top vote-getter with 463, followed by Kailyn Baker (454) and Stephanie Emiliani (441).

•In the Wilson Central School District, the proposed \$29.4 million budget was approved (161-63). Proposition No. 2, providing for a non-voting student member on the BOE, was approved, too. (175-46).

Top vote-getters on the Wilson Board of Education were Christopher Carlin (190) and Bethzaida Hart (183).

The New York State School Boards Association said state voters approved 97.3% of proposed school district budgets, signifying a continuing support of education in a troubled economy.

"New York voters continue to support their school budgets in large numbers, and our association greatly appreciates that support," NYSSBA Executive Director Robert Schneider said. "Voters understand that their boards of education are crafting spending plans that maximize student services and programs while balancing the

ability of their local taxpayers to pay."

Despite increasing costs, school districts were able to limit their tax levy increases to an average of 2.58% statewide while holding their proposed spending increases to 3.58%, NYSSBA noted.

NYSSBA reviewed voting results for 671 of the 675 districts statewide that held budget votes. A total of 653 school district budgets were approved by voters, while 18 were defeated. Where budgets were defeated, school districts may again put a budget before voters on June 18.

Statewide, 32 districts sought approval to override their property tax caps this year, meaning their proposed budgets needed a 60% "super majority" approval to pass. Of those seeking an override, 22 budgets passed and 10 failed, a 68.8% approval rate.

Since the tax cap was introduced in 2012, about two-thirds of budgets requiring an override have been approved on the first try.

For the 639 districts whose budget was within the tax cap and needed support from only a majority of voters for budget passage, 631 (98.7%) passed on the first try.

IN THE NEWS

Cemetery ceremony set

Hello everyone! I cordially invite to join in on the Capt. Van Cleve and veterans memorial monument on Sunday. The dedication of Van Cleves' markers will be in the old cemetery right next to the old church at noon. It will be an unveiling of the grave markers they never received upon their deaths in 1886 and 1888. Wheatfield Historian Justin Higner will portray Capt. Van Cleve and tell the background story of the Van Cleves with the ceremonial wreath-laying ceremony. Claudia Werth Carnes will portray the widow, Rev. Mrs. Smith, mourning the Van Cleves and the veterans who have gone before us.

Following at 1 p.m., down below in the Oakwood section, will be the dedication and blessing of the veterans memorial flagpole and memorial bench. Rev. Dr. Joyce Serrianni will be presiding once more at my request for the blessing and dedication ceremony. The VFW Honor Guard will be present for the raising of the colors ceremony and dedication, accompanied by a wreath-laying ceremony to honor all of our veterans - past, present, and those who will serve in the future years to come.

There will be two memorial trees planted in the near future to add color and beauty to the grounds. Jim Farchione of Niagara Monument Works has graciously worked with me with my budget and has donated the praying child statue who will forever pray for all

veterans. I have worked tirelessly volunteering my time to clean and restore the cemetery the past three years for residents and visitors alike to explore the grounds.

Amidst all of this, I have been searching out and acquiring even more Lewiston-related artifacts for the museum collection (at the Red Brick). I also have received some donations of Lewiston history from a few residents for display and preservation. There are some new additions in the main hallway, as well.

Look forward to seeing everyone for the dedication and acknowledgement of the generous donors who have made my veterans project a reality.

Russ Piper
Village of Lewiston Historian

Herschell Carrousel & NT Neighborhood Watch announce \$1 admission

The Herschell Carrousel Factory Museum announced the North Tonawanda Neighborhood Watch is sponsoring admission for the grand opening of Kiddieland on May 25.

A press release stated, "Based upon the generous sponsorship of the NT Neighborhood Watch, the museum will be offering \$1 admission Saturday, May 25, the opening day of Kiddieland, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. \$1 museum admission applies to all visitors; under 2 and members free. Rides are \$1 each."

Director Ian Seppala said, "We are proud to announce this exciting partnership with NT Neighborhood Watch. Both organizations are proud members of this community and are committed to helping the families of North Tonawanda."

Neighborhood Watch Chairman Joe Marranca said, "We are thrilled to partner with the historic Herschell Carrousel Factory Museum for this event. We couldn't think of a better way to bring joy and happiness to children in our community."

The Kiddieland Testing Park Exhibit houses four Allan Herschell rides for children between 34 and 52 inches. The rides are open starting May 25. For more information, visit <https://www.carrouselmuseum.org/hours-admission-directions.html>.

Veterans Memorial Wall rededication in NT

City of North Tonawanda Mayor Austin Tylec and Historian Susan Gosch announce the rededication of the Veterans Memorial Wall in Brauer Park. This event will be held at 4 p.m. Friday, May 31, at 214 Payne Ave., in the park adjacent to City Hall. Parking is available in the City Hall parking lot or on the street, free of charge.

The memorial wall, also referred to as "The Roll of Honor," was constructed shortly after World War II ended and commemorates the residents of North Tonawanda who served their country in WWII, the

Korean and Vietnam wars. The initial dedication took place on Memorial Day in 1946. At that time, the names of around 1,500 North

Tonawanda citizens who served in WWII were engraved on individual bronze plates resting on mahogany behind glass panels.

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