

Grand Island celebrates milestones on Independence Day



From left: Dave Conboy and Dick Bessel at the start of the kids' run. • Dancers from the Grand Island Dance Center celebrate Independence Day. • A large group awaits the start of the kids' run.

Story and photos by Senior Contributing Writer
ALICE GERARD

Grand Island's first Independence Day run was organized by Richard "Dick" Bessel to celebrate the bicentennial of the United States in 1976.

At the time, Bessel was a long-time track coach. According to a 2005 article in the Buffalo News, Bessel was the first boys' track coach at Grand Island High School. He also started the girls' track team. He has coached athletes at the Empire State Games, and he organized a summer track club.

This year, the race, titled the Dick Bessel Independence Day Run, celebrated its 50th anniversary, as well as the semiquincentennial of the U.S.

Town Recreation Supervisor Joe Menter said there were 704 finishers in the adult run and more than 150 in the kids' run.

"At 50 years, this is the third-longest consecutively run race in Western New York," he said. "Again, we have generations of families taking part in this great run. And the Schmitz family heading up the Webb Road community to provide the water sta-

tion and mid-race cooldown with music, just another great part of this tradition."

The 50th anniversary of the run was "amazing," Menter said. "Again, it was an honor to be able to recognize Dick with the Town Board proclamation a few weeks ago and to recognize the people who made the run what it is today: Dick Bessel and his family, Linda Tuffillaro, Kristen Beauchamp and the honorary starters Art Pelletier and David Conboy."

The parade that followed the race attracted approximately 4,000 spectators, Menter said.

"The parade participants give them a great show, from the law enforcement escort and the VFW and American Legion leading the parade, the Grand Island Fire Co. showing how strong (and important) their volunteer department is, to the pipe and drum bands and different music bands, to the twirlers and dancers, to the variety of floats," he said. "It's nonstop entertainment. Speaking of entertainment: Our parade announcer, Eric Volk, always does a phenomenal job at the reviewing stand.

"To have Carson Hinkle play

the national anthem was special. Carson is another product of the distinguished GICSD music department, and a valued recreation department employee.

"For me, the highlight (of the event) is always the good job my recreation staff does, along with the Grand Island Police Department and other law enforcement, parks department and highway department, to make sure the run and parade go smoothly and safely. Being able to organize this event that generations of Islanders and visitors from all over the country enjoy is an honor."

Grand Island files suit against federal government in Seneca land transfer

Town contends Interior Department land ruling impacts operations; Seneca Nation claims sovereignty rights

By Editor-in-Chief
TERRY DUFFY

The \$1 land transfer of 207 acres from Acquest Development to the Seneca Nation of Indians earlier this year has spurred new round of legal action from the Town of Grand Island.

According to the online source Law360, the town filed a lawsuit last month against the U.S. Department of the Interior, challenging its decision of the transfer. The action argues the federal agency's ruling now impacts a number of town operational/enforcement areas. Included in the suit are restrictions placed on Grand Island zoning and land use, enforcement regulations and town easement access rights.

The suit, Town of Grand Island vs. United States Department of the Interior, et al. (Case 1:26-cv-01286), was filed June 23 in U.S. District Court For the Western

District of New York. It follows the February decision by the U.S. Department of the Interior to place the Seneca lands into "restricted fee access."

Town officials contend the Seneca land, located adjacent to the I-190 on the northwest corner of Grand Island, violates provisions of the federal government's Seneca Nation Settlement Act of 1990. Specifically, Grand Island is challenging the legalities of Interior's decision covering restricted fee status for the new Seneca property and its impact to the town.

"Restricted fee land is property owned by an Indigenous nation where the title is held by the owner, but its sale requires DOI approval. By placing the land into the status, it is exempt from state and local taxation," the federal agency said.

In its filing, the town said the Seneca property includes town easements for

Grand Island drainage and infrastructure operations, including an active pump station that serves its residents.

"The parcel was stripped from the town's tax rolls, removed from its regulatory jurisdiction, and declared sovereign tribal territory based on a decision that does not qualify under the statute invoked to justify it," the town argues.

As a result, Grand Island said the Interior decision now deprives the town "of an estimated annual \$20,000 in property tax revenue and its authority to enforce zoning laws, land use regulations and environmental protections, including wetland designations," according to Law360.

Grand Island further contends the land transfer now impacts its future growth potential: "The (Seneca) parcel constitutes over forty percent of the undeveloped commercial real estate within the town and rep-

resents one of the town's primary areas of future economic growth and development, which has now been eliminated."

The town contends, "Vacating (Interior's) decision would restore the town's taxing and regulatory jurisdiction over the parcel, reenforce enforcement of the town's zoning and land use regulations, and remove the impairment of the town's easement access rights."

Attorneys Peter C. Godfrey, Daniel A. Spitzer and Adam W. Perry of Hodgson Ross LLP are representing the town.

In response to the lawsuit, the Seneca Nation said town officials are, "trying to deny a sovereign nation our rights and our rightful opportunities for progress and advancement," according to a recent WIVB-TV Channel 4 news report.

Department of the Interior officials were unavailable to comment as of this writing.

Obituaries

Niagara Frontier Publications celebrates the life of your loved ones through obituaries. We welcome submissions from funeral homes, crematoriums and individuals.

Find more obituaries, as well as an order form, on our website, www.wnypapers.com.

Mary Ann Crowe

Mary Ann Crowe, 93, passed peacefully on July 4 in her home on Grand Island.

Mary Ann, the only child of Kenneth and Clara Kumro, was born June 30, 1933. She grew up on Adams Street in Tonawanda and she was the valedictorian of her graduating class at Mount St. Mary Academy. With a recommendation from the Sisters of St. Mary's, she was able to attend Niagara University on a scholarship. She graduated summa cum laude and received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from Niagara in 1955.

While at Niagara, she met her future husband of 64 years, George F. Crowe, who graduated from Niagara in 1954. They

remained dedicated to education and to Niagara through the following decades. They endowed a nursing scholarship at Niagara and, in honor of their son, Terry, also endowed scholarships at both Niagara and Canisius College for ROTC students.

In 2015, Mary Ann and George received the Distinguished Alumni Award for their long-term contributions to Niagara University.

After graduation in 1955, Mary Ann began a nursing career, in which she worked continually for almost 40 years. She specialized in gastroenterology, primarily in hospitals, including a long stint at DeGraff Memorial Hospital.

Mary Ann had an unwavering



devotion to her family. She and George raised their children on Grand Island and were active in numerous community events. Af-

ter becoming a Gold Star mother in 2005, when her son, Terry, was killed in action in Iraq, she and George remained steadfast in their devotion to God, family and country.

Fiercely independent, she elected repeated hip surgeries in her late 80s. After her husband, George, passed in 2021 – and wheelchair-bound – she continued to live in their home until the time of her death.

Mary Ann Crowe was the loving mother of Kate Olin, Peg (Randy) White, Daniel G. Crowe, Molly (Jeff) McRaney, and the late Lt. Col. Terrence K. Crowe; the dedicated grandmother of Jeremiah J. and Clara L. Crowe, Abigail C. and Kam Olin, Ryan

D. (Mary), Patrick M., Margaret Mary, Kathleen Grace and Brigid H. White, Shannon and Casey Grace, and Sydney and Allison Crowe; and proud great-grandmother of Quinn and Lyla Crowe.

Visitation to be held at Kaiser Funeral Home on Grand Island from 4-7 p.m. Sunday, July 12. A Mass of Christian burial will be celebrated at 9:30 a.m. Monday, July 13, at St. Stephen R.C. Church on Grand Island.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the George and Mary Ann Crowe Nursing Scholarship at Niagara University.

Share condolences at kaiserfuneral.com.