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Town of Niagara: Virtuoso & Parks make history

BY TIMOTHY CHIPP

Contributing Writer

History was made in the Town of Niagara last Tuesday night. Not just once but twice.

Sylvia Virtuoso, running without opposition, was elected as the first woman supervisor in the town's history. And joining her on the Town Board is Johnny Parks, the town's first Black councilman.

"It's important to set an example for all the other women," Virtuoso said. "It's the breaking of glass ceilings and all that, to open up opportunities to everyone else. It's important that it happens, especially with my two daughters and two granddaughters. It's an exciting time."

"It stands huge in my eyes," Parks added. "The town didn't see color; they saw the right person to do the job. That's huge for me. With a town of our size, sometimes you don't see that. But our town elected the right person. They see me as the right person for the job, not as just a person of color."

Joining Virtuoso, who has been town clerk for 24 years, and Parks – operations coordinator of the Good-year Tire plant in Niagara Falls – will be Michael Lee. Lee led a three-candidate pool filling two council openings Tuesday, collecting almost 42% of votes according to an unofficial tally.

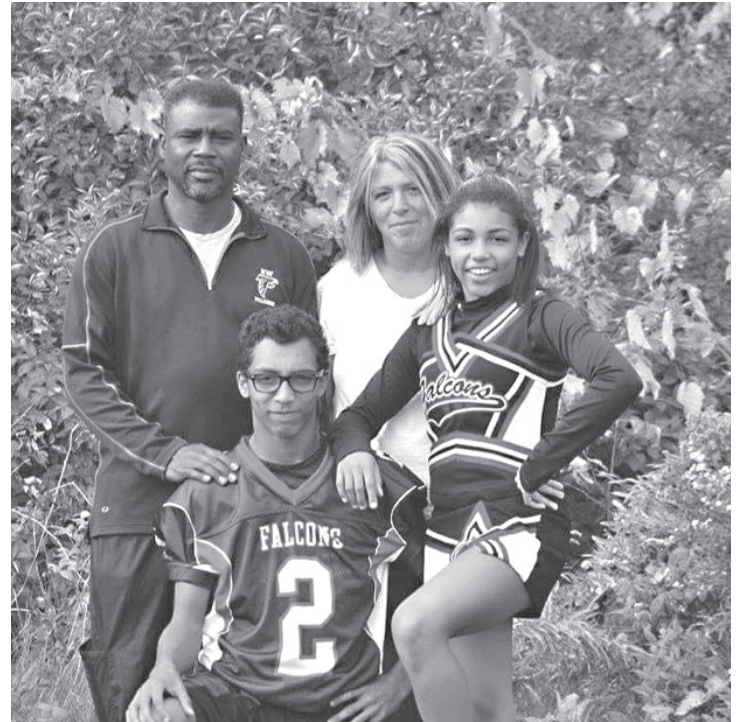
Parks, meanwhile, collected about 30% of votes for second place.

Donald E. Schildhauer placed third with about 27.5% of the votes.

Parks and Lee will replace outgoing councilmen Samuel Gatto, who was elected Tuesday as town justice, and Richard Sirianni, who was elected highway superintendent.

Both outgoing councilmen were unopposed in their quests for the new positions.

Meanwhile, Melissa Cerrillo won unopposed to replace Virtuoso as town clerk.



Sylvia Virtuoso • Johnny Parks and family (Submitted photos)

Moving Forward

Virtuoso has known for a while she would be the town's next supervisor. Ever since current Supervisor Lee Wallace announced he was not seeking a new term and no one filed to challenge her ascent to the position, it was essentially a foregone conclusion.

She's ready to tackle some of the town's most important issues going forward.

Like working with the Building Department on getting some nuisance issues figured out. In recent months, issues have sprung up like how massive campers and trailers have been parked in driveways and on streets, essentially causing blind areas for drivers and pedestrians.

There are also some financial concerns moving forward. And Virtuoso said one way she'd like to tackle them is by attracting more businesses to the Military Road corridor to

capitalize even more on the area's tourism industry.

"I'd like us to be luring larger restaurants and 'big box' stores to the Military road area," she said. "Being close to the Canadian border, we have an advantage."

Additionally, she said, a major issue going forward will be the availability of affordable senior housing, including patio homes.

People don't want to leave the area, but also don't want large residences, she said.

So, she's planning on working with developers, including the current owner of the former Military Road school building, to entice some right-sized options for the area's older residents.

Taxes Incoming

Parks, meanwhile, said there's some unfortunate news the Town Board will be presenting residents soon.

A garbage tax.

With the Republic Services Allied Waste Niagara Falls Landfill in its twilight, Parks said it looks inevitable a tax is coming.

With that, there will hopefully be ways to lessen the impact on residents, who have enjoyed living in a municipality without a general, townwide tax.

Like an upcoming reassessment, something the current Town Board first heard about earlier this year. It's a project the new elected officials will take on after the new year, with a goal of figuring out property values.

The town hasn't had a reassessment in more than 30 years, Parks said, with the hope of attracting some of those new businesses Virtuoso has her eye on.

"We're going to do what's best for the town," Parks said.

Town of Niagara Highway Department ready to roll

BY TIMOTHY CHIPP

Contributing Writer

Whenever the white flakes decide to make their presence known, Town of Niagara Highway Department Supervisor Richard Sirianni is ready.

Earlier this month, Sirianni ordered about 200 tons of salt for the upcoming winter season, his first in the position since taking over for the retired Robert Herman in September.

Sirianni, who ran unopposed for election to the position, was appointed by the Town Board early to facilitate Herman's retirement and maintain continuity in the department entering autumn.

Not only does Sirianni have the supplies, he has the crew and equipment needed to ensure whatever happens this winter is handled quickly and without incident.

"We've got our four plows ready to go," he said. "All of our salters are mounted and calibrated. They're all ready."

Since the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center has almost all of Western New York pegged for a warmer-than-average winter season – with normal to slightly below normal precipitation, due to the El Niño developing in the Pacific Ocean – it's unclear when the snow will arrive.

In the meantime, Sirianni said, the highway crews are still out in the community collecting fallen leaves left at the street.

It's a labor-intensive operation, he said, with four or five guys needed to accomplish the collecting and dumping – leaves are left, for now, on a hill near the department's barn on Lockport Road, he said.

"It'll get done," Sirianni said. "It just takes time."

Of course, the snow will eventually arrive. And when it does, the salt Sirianni purchased will come in handy keeping the town-owned roads free of ice.

Where the salt comes from has changed this year, thanks to a new

Niagara County bid. It left Sirianni unsure, as one of his first actions in the role was placing the order.

He quickly got it figured out, though.

"I was actually calling our old supplier and they told me they couldn't help me," he said. "So, we have no choice (where the salt comes from). The county changed it and we have no choice in it."

"But we are saving money."

The new salt order, according to New York State official documents, comes from a Kansas-headquartered Compass Minerals America, from a packaging facility in Lackawanna. The contract replaces this

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