

'In the Loop' with the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education

Lew-Port budget passes by decisive margin

BY JODEE RIORDAN
Board of Education President

Thank you to all who voted in our Board of Education election and budget vote. With the election/vote conducted for the first time completely by absentee ballot, voter engagement was extremely high. Over 18,000 ballots were mailed (to each registered voter) and 3,981 were returned. To put this in perspective, last year the voter turnout was 630. This year's vote reflects an increase in voter turnout of 3% to 22%.

The 2020-21 budget passed with a decisive margin (2,644 to 1,183), more than 2:1 in favor. The overwhelming support for the budget speaks to the strong commitment to education of the Lewiston-Porter community, and that the community supports the direction this district is headed, as the budget supports Lew-Port's strategic plan. With the budget and project approved Lewiston-Porter now moves forward, optimistic but all the while steeling ourselves for the uncertainty of the 2020-21 school year.

The results of the Board of Education Election are as follows:

Anika Fetzner, 1,830 votes; Charlotte Huebschmann, 2,404; Jennifer Klemick, 2,377; and Danielle Mullen, 2,690.

Huebschmann and Mullen were each elected to three-year (2020-23) terms on the Board of Education. Klemick was elected to a one-year (2020-21) term, and sworn in on Wednesday. The one-year term began immediately, as it fills a vacancy.

Mullen had been appointed fill this vacancy in 2019, the term of which by Education Law expires upon the next election, and now must step down for two weeks

until her new three-year term begins. The board thanks Mullen for her service throughout the 2019-20 school year, and looks forward to her return to the BOE on July 1.

Thank you to Anika Fetzner and each of the candidates for stepping up to run for the board at this crucial, yet uncertain time. We look forward to continuing the good work of the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education.

The board will meet at 6 p.m. Tuesday for its monthly (June) meeting. At this time, public meetings are still being held remotely

(via Zoom). Once the board receives guidance from New York state, we will return to the Board Room at the Community Resource Center, with strict social distancing protocols in place. The annual organizational meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. Wednesday, July 1. In 2020-21, Board of Education meetings will take place on the second (work session/meeting) and fourth (regular business meeting) Mondays of each month, at 6 p.m.

Again, thank you for your support of education at Lewiston-Porter, now and always.

Kiwanis (cont.)



Benjamin and Joshua Cardamone

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Jackson stated, "This really struck a chord with me and made me realize I can help those in need through my aerospace degree." He plans to research VTOL (vertical takeoff and landing) planes and commented, "I feel that VTOL planes will be a tremendous attribute to emergency services." Jackson hopes to create a plane that will provide patients with faster and more cost effective emergency air service.

Benjamin and Joshua Cardamone

Benjamin Cardamone plans to attend the University at Buffalo and major in civil engineering. He has volunteered with Empower, the Lancer Council, the Donate Life Club and at the public library. "For me, volunteering at non-profit organizations and at local events has allowed me to realize my own strength and inspire me to move forward with my education to ensure that I can continue to help others and give back," Ben said.

Joshua Cardamone also intends to major in civil engineering at the University at Buffalo. He has volunteered with Empower, Lancer Council, Donate Life Club, and at the public library.

According to Josh, "Volunteering has changed who I am as a person and how I perceive the world." He indicated that his community service and volunteer work helped influence his desire to further his education and to seek a career in civil engineering. While volunteering with Empower, he was told by organizers how fulfilling their lives were and how they were able to make a difference in other peoples' lives. Josh shared that "community service has inspired me to continue on and achieve my dreams of becoming an engineer."

"Volunteering and seeing the real world showed me the good and power that civil engineers

can have. Seeing public works projects and plans made by these engineers to better communities and meet the needs of people was inspiring and made me want to learn more about this career, and to use it as a way to give back and continue to aid my community."

School board (cont.)

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along, but I have a feeling that next year's budget will not be not as easy, unfortunately," Kennedy said.

He also extended support to candidates Jeremy Geartz and Jacob Quinn.

"I really thank them for getting involved in the race. Everyone put their best foot forward and offered some good comments and got some good feedback, and I hope they'll continue to be involved in the process, because we have a seven-member board, but it takes more voices than just our seven members," Kennedy said. "I think it makes sense to have good civil discourse and to give the community different perspectives. ... We're all from different walks of life, so I think the other candidates definitely brought some unique perspective."

Niemiec praised the overall voter turnout this year and said absentee voting is something he would like to see more of as it encourages people to be involved in the electoral process.

Niemiec also expressed gratitude to his supporters and explained why this year meant so much to him.

"It was actually kind of special for me. I was one of the first openly gay elected officials in Niagara County, and with it now being Pride Month, and with the election moving to that, it was reassuring that people from all walks of life could stand up and take to representation in their community," he said.

Niemiec also went on to thank Geartz and Quinn and encouraged them not to get discouraged.

"I hope that they continue to participate in the process. There's always ways to get involved. There's committees

where community members can serve alongside our district, and I encourage them to work with us because they can bring insights that some of us might not be aware of," Niemiec said.

Niagara-Wheatfield

In the Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District, a \$77,119,627 budget for the 2020-21 school year was approved 3,213 to 1,397. The figures represent a 3.66% increase from last year as the board works to offset a lack of funds coming in from New York due to the coronavirus. While the budget includes a 1.69% tax levy increase, most of the budget is slated to be paid through reserves the district has on hand.

Another proposition authorizing the district to expend from its capital reserves passed 3,647 to 1,123. The capital reserves allow the district to continue to pay for the capital projects currently in progress. A third and final proposition authorizing the district to expend from its capital transportation reserve to pay for new buses passed 3,531-1,123.

In the school board election, incumbent Jason Myers secured reelection with 2,603 votes, while Michael Lee and John Forcucci picked up the remaining two seats with 2178 and 1999 votes, respectively. Incumbent board Vice President Darren Sneed finished sixth

with 1,627 votes. Board member Gina Terbot, who did not seek reelection after serving on the board for six years, vacated the third seat on the board.

Following his win, Myers shared the following message on the Wheatfield, NY Community page:

"Thank you to everyone who supported my re-election to the school board - I am humbled and grateful to be able to serve another term! Also, congratulations to Mike Lee and John Forcucci on your election victories. I look forward to working with you on the board! And a big thank you to the NW community for passing the budget!"

In a phone call with the Tribune, Myers added, "I know a lot of things are still up in the air on what things are going to look like when we get back to school in the fall, but we're hoping to get things as close to normal as possible, as soon as possible. We're doing whatever we can to make sure everyone is safe as far as sanitation goes, making sure we get new equipment and the buildings are cleaned well."

He went on to say he's content where the district is financially going into next year and hopes the board can "keep the budget in check while providing a great education."

The Tribune was unable to reach Forcucci or Lee for comment.



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