

## Editorial

# What is the price of leadership?

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

— Margaret Mead

Sometimes change starts with just one person.

We commend Brian Tomasik, a senior at Guilderland High School, who tried to convince the Guilderland School Board to purchase recycled paper for the district.

Tomasik has environmentalism in his blood. He and his sister, Michelle, grew up on Ketcham Road. "My parents used to farm organically and raise a lot of their own food," he told us.

The family now lives on Old Stage Road. His mother works for The Nature Conservancy, in its Natural Heritage Program, developing maps of endangered species, he said. His father works for the state, reviewing the environmental impact of low-income housing projects.

When Tomasik got to high school, he joined the Student Environmental Action Coalition — a small group of committed environmentalists — and discovered the high school wasn't recycling cans and bottles.

"It wasn't part of the budget that year," he said.

The group talked to administrators and set up collection boxes in each classroom. Members of the coalition — there are only a half-dozen this year — empty those boxes into a Dumpster on school grounds, which is filled with recyclables each week.

"I don't see too many cans or bottles in garbage cans anymore," said Tomasik, with quiet satisfaction in his voice.

In 10th grade, while participating in coalition activities like girdling aspen at the Pine Bush Preserve or writing letters to members of Congress about environmental issues, Tomasik became interested in recycled paper.

"I just started researching," he said.

Tomasik is now president of the coalition and he is also the top-ranked student in his class. He doesn't pigeon-hole himself with one particular interest.

"I enjoy lots of different subjects," he said and he has applied to strong liberal arts colleges for next year — Swarthmore, Princeton, Bowdoin, and Bates — with the goal of studying as widely and deeply as he can. That is, unless he's accepted into the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program, in which case he'll study for a year in Germany before going to college.

Tomasik has studied German since the sixth grade. His grandmother was German and her father, Louis DeVries, was a professor of German who wrote dictionaries, Tomasik said.

Tomasik is hesitant to name a favorite Guilderland teacher since he's learned so much from so many but, when pressed, he names eighth-grade science teacher Richard Lasselle.

"I liked his novel way of looking at the world," said Tomasik. "He encouraged his students to understand rather than just to memorize. He encouraged curiosity and learning for the sake of learning, instead of learning to do well on a test."

Tomasik took those lessons to heart.

His research on recycled paper is far-ranging and cogently stated. Tomasik presented the Guilderland School Board with a four-page argument (printed on both sides of two sheets, of course) titled "Ten Reasons to Purchase Recycled Paper." The treatise includes 37 footnotes.

"Traditional virgin paper contributes substantially to deforestation," writes Tomasik, with facts to back it up. But the consequences, he continues, go beyond logging. The pulp and paper industry is the fifth greatest industrial energy user world-wide and the second greatest in the United States.

It takes at least two to three-and-a-half tons of wood to manufacture one ton of virgin paper while one ton of recycled paper, in contrast, requires only slightly more than one ton of old paper.

Besides the massive energy consumption, paper production creates direct air emissions as well, which increases greenhouse gases and hastens ozone depletion — adding to global warming. Some of the pollutants are carcinogenic and all can cause toxic health effects.

The manufacture of one ton of virgin paper requires more water — 12,000 to 22,000 gallons — than the creation of a ton of any other industrial product; a ton of 30-percent recycled paper

conserves 3,000 gallons of water.

And wastewater from the virgin pulp and paper industry contains thousands of types of particles that can acidify, cloud, and deoxygenate streams and lakes, killing fish and other species.

Paper comprises 40 percent of municipal solid waste. The manufacture of just one ton of 30-percent recycled paper averts the addition of three cubic yards of material to landfills.

Buying recycled paper augments demand for the product and increases production, and many businesses and institutions, including the federal government, already purchase recycled paper.

Finally, Tomasik concludes, buying recycled paper would "enhance the district's leadership role in promoting innovative solutions." He writes, "The purchase of recycled paper would provide an opportunity to educate students about environmental issues and ways to address them."

The school district, with a \$70 million annual budget, takes bids on 840 cases of paper three to five times a year, Tomasik told us. While prices vary, on average, he said, a bid for recycled paper cost \$1.50 more per case than recycled paper. The bids received in April of 2004 showed recycled paper would have cost an additional \$1,240 (an increase of 8.6 percent over the virgin price) while the bids in the fall of 2004 showed recycled paper would have cost \$1,008 more (an increase of 5.9 percent).

Environmentally-sensitive purchasing is always more expensive, said board member Richard Weisz as the school board discussed the issue last week. He suggested occasionally buying recycled paper.

Board President William Brinkman said that might be a possibility "if economic times were better."

"In the real world," said Brinkman, "the economics of running a public school compel us to be very fiscally conservative... We have to watch every dollar we spend... Economics tend to control the decisions we make."

The board decided on the less expensive virgin paper.

Such decisions are being made by the conscientious guardians of public funds everywhere in our country. But we would argue the public is better served if efforts are made to preserve our world for future generations.

We received this week our winter issue of *Planning News*, published by the New York Planning Federation. An article, "A Clean Wind in Dutchess County," highlighted the town of Pleasant Valley, population 10,000, which made national news last fall when it decided to purchase 100 percent of its electricity from wind turbines.

The move is costing the town about 15 percent more — at an annual cost of about \$2 more per household.

"I expected to get some complaints from the community," said the supervisor, "but we didn't get any complaints from anyone. In fact, we even got a couple of 'attaboys!'"

He said the savings came in the form of protecting the environment. Pleasant Valley's decision to use wind power creates no pollution and relieves the atmosphere annually of 356,000 pounds of carbon monoxide, a main global-warming gas.

"We may be paying a little extra," said the supervisor, "but we're reducing our dependence on fossil fuel. We think it's well worth it for the future."

We are currently destroying our world for future generations with our gluttonous consumption. The pressure to preserve may not be as immediate as the pressure to pass the next school budget, but, in the long run, residents may well appreciate the foresight of those who inspire us, like Tomasik, to make the world a better place.

The school board might even hear some "attaboys!" if it took the bold step of purchasing recycled paper.

"Perhaps most importantly," wrote Tomasik to the board, "this would set a good example to students, parents, and citizens, both within and beyond the district, of the importance of taking small but essential actions that help to ensure a more sustainable world for posterity."

## To the editor



# Meet the candidates at the Altamont library

To the Editor:

I am writing to clarify some misconceptions regarding the Meet the Candidates Night that the Altamont Free Library is sponsoring on Thursday, March 3. As a library, our mission is to engender communication and information in a variety of ways.

In the past, when an election has been contested in our village, the library has sponsored Meet the Candidate forums so that the citizens of the village can hear, from those running for office, their views on the issues that affect the residents.

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan group trained to conduct such forums. It does this throughout the United States as a service in its mission to "encourage the informed and

active participation of citizens in government; work to increase understanding of major public policy."

By requesting that this organization assist with the coordination of this forum, as it has done in the past here in Altamont, the perception of bias and prejudice is removed.

The board of trustees of the library invites all of the people of Altamont to join in hearing the views of the mayoral candidates and meeting the trustee candidates on Thursday, March 3, at 7:30 p.m. at the St. Lucy's Parish Center.

**Barbara J. Quackenbush,  
President  
Altamont Free Library  
Board of Trustees**

# Less incendiary course would tolerate individual expression

To the Editor:

Jerry Oliver's letter in the Feb. 17 edition of the paper made unfair and misleading claims about two local organizations, Altamont Community Tradition and the League of Women Voters.

ACT, Jerry claims, "has become a political vehicle," because some of its board members have publicly supported one mayoral and one trustee candidate in the upcoming village election. ACT's bylaws do not allow political endorsements as an organization, but individual members are free to express themselves as they please, as it should be.

Jerry goes on to say that the League of Women Voters represents some sort of bureaucratic "intrusion" into Altamont by conducting a mayoral debate.

This non-partisan organization performs a vital service to citizens who would like to see and hear what candidates think and have to say about important issues. I fail to see how this constitutes an "unnecessary" event for Altamont at a time when residents have many candidates to consider for mayor and trustee positions.

I don't feel it is helpful to deride entire organizations in our community when you may differ in opinion with some individuals in those groups. And "a less incendiary course for the future," it would seem, is one that is more tolerant of individuals' right to express themselves politically, regardless of their choice of candidate.

**Greg Giorgio  
Altamont**

# ACT is not political

To The Editor:

I am writing in response to Jerry Oliver's comments in last week's *Enterprise* regarding the nature of the Altamont Community Tradition. As indicated in our mission statement, ACT is a non-profit organization dedicated to community service through education, revitalization efforts, resource assistance, and community involvement, with emphasis on the historic, cultural, economic, architecture and landscape environment within the village of Altamont and its surrounding area.

The word "political" is not included in that statement for the simple reason that ACT is not a political organization.

Some of the events with which our organization has been involved this past year include Altamont Green and Clean, the Spring Canteen honoring hometown heroes Cindy Pollard and Phyllis Schilling, the Village-wide Picnic at Bozenkill Park, and the Victorian Holiday.

In planning and carrying out these events we have worked with several other community groups such as the Altamont Free Library, the Community Caregivers, the Masons, and local troops of Girl Scouts and

Boy Scouts, as well as the village.

We are extremely fortunate to have a board of directors comprised of 20 people, as well as other members, who care deeply about Altamont and are very active in the community both as members of ACT and as individuals. In our nation's democratic system of government, individual citizens have the right to express their own opinions and beliefs. In voicing personal ideas, hopes, or concerns about the upcoming village election, none of the board members has ever claimed to represent a consensus viewpoint on the part of ACT.

If anyone has any questions about the Altamont Community Tradition, please feel free to contact me at 861-3660. The public is welcome to attend our monthly board meetings, which are typically held in the Masonic Hall on Maple Avenue, on the second Tuesday of the month, at 7 in the evening. The next meeting will be Tuesday, March 8, at 7 at the Masonic Hall.

If you would like more information about our organization, please plan to attend.

**Beth Shaw, President  
Altamont Community  
Tradition**