



Town of Somerset

Volume 24, Issue 3

December 2009

From Your Town Clerk



Dear Residents,

As I was researching something recently, I stumbled upon this in our local paper of 1910 and thought it was very appropriate for our times now. From the Barker Register – dated March 12, 1910, Vol. VI No. XII:

“What a blessing it is that life is a struggle. If everything was made easy for us most of the joy of living would be taken away. There is an exhilaration and blessing in the efforts we put forth, often against great odds, and every victory means added strength and power.”

As we reflect on 2009, may you enjoy this most joyous of seasons.

Becky Connolly

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

*Tis the Season
 throughout all of the town,
 A time when friends get together
 and colleagues gather around,
 As you get together
 in your own special way,
 May everyone enjoy their special Holidays.
 May your days be merry and future bright
 and may your New Year start out just right.
 Greetings to all and this is the reason
 We at the Town Hall wish you a
 “Happy Holiday Season”.*

**May your holidays be blessed and
 May your joys and happiness extend
 into the New Year. Happy 2010!!!**



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The Councilman's Corner

2009 in Review

2009 was a busy, active, and eventful year for your Town Council. As the year comes to a close, we want to provide you with this brief summary.

The Somerset Government Efficiency Committee began its work to lower the cost and improve the efficiencies of service to the residents and businesses of Somerset. Its first major initiative was to see if efficiencies could be improved and costs could be reduced in the area of real property assessment. As a result of its work, beginning January 2010, Somerset will join the other 86% of Towns in NYS who have realized the benefits of a sole Appointed Assessor. The next SGEC evaluation will cover the reduction of costs relative to benefits earned by part time elected officials, by requiring them to contribute a portion of the expense.

Securing and maintaining legal representation is an important function of your local government in order to protect the interests of the Town. By requiring firms to compete for service this year, the Board launched an open and multi-county search, evaluation, and selection process for such representation. We are confident that the results of this RFP process have secured the best possible firm at the most competitive cost to provide legal counsel to our Town at this present time and juncture.

In an effort to provide our Town Prosecutor and Justice of the Peace with the tools required to provide for a more peaceful community, the Board researched, evaluated, and voted into law a new dog control ordinance that provides for the enhanced regulation of chronic barking dogs, which have become a more frequent and troubling issue voiced by many residents.

At the Board's December meeting, a long awaited and monumental decision was made regarding the AES Somerset plant, our largest business and valued neighbor. The first step toward this decision was taken in August of this year when cooperative and successful negotiations between the Town and AES occurred. The culmination occurred when the Barker Central School District, the Niagara County Legislature, and the Somerset Town Board all voted unanimously on December 1st to initiate the final steps required to enter into a locally negotiated five year PILOT agreement with AES. **This mutually beneficial arrangement** will dismiss all past and present litigation while establishing a consistent level of revenue for the taxing jurisdictions and the tax certainty that AES needs to be a successful business in our Town. This PILOT is a win-win for all taxpayers and will save considerable sums of money. We want to especially recognize the local AES management team for their commitment to engage in these fruitful discussions with Supervisor Meyers and the Town Board. Additionally, special thanks go out to the BCS administration and Board of Education for their support and unanimous approval of this agreement. Our County Legislator, The Hon. John Syracuse, worked tirelessly on our behalf. We would like to thank him and all the members of the Niagara County Legislature for their unanimous vote of support. Mr. Mark Gabriele, who provides legal counsel to the NCIDA, was of particular assistance as we worked through the capabilities and limitations of PILOT agreements; we thank him for his help.

The Highway Superintendent, Town Clerk and Superintendent of Water, Sewer, & Parks are committed to cost efficiency in their departments to meet the allocated budget goals set by the Town Board. We are pleased to report that the recently approved 2010 budget is \$346,920 less than 2009's budget and that the tax rate will not increase next year.

After many years of dedicated service to Somerset, **Councilpersons Dudley Chaffee and April Gow** have decided to retire from the Town Board and pursue other interests. We want to extend our sincere best wishes to both of these honorable and highly effective Board members. Councilpersons elect Gary Alt and Robin Jansen will be sworn in during the January meeting and will round out your elected Board in 2010.

Finally, we wish to extend our since best wishes to you for **Merry Christmas and a safe and productive New Year**. May God richly bless you and your family at this most Holy time of the year.

Please feel free to contact us with your ideas, questions, or concerns. All of the Town official's contact information can be found on the Town's website: www.somersetny.org

Thank you.

Supervisor Richard Meyers, Councilmen Randy Wayner and Daniel Engert



NEWS FROM THE HIGHWAY DEPT. Kenneth J Bigelow, Superintendent of Highways 795-3866

Just a few friendly reminders from the Highway Dept. that leaving snow on the highway is prohibited by Section 1219 of the Vehicle and Traffic Law and Section 214 of Highway Law of the State of New York.

Parking on any Town Road is prohibited in accordance with provisions of the Town of Somerset code 191-15 as specified in Schedule XI (191-33) 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. From November 1 to April 1.

To bring everyone up to date with the bridge replacement project for the bridge on Lower Lake Rd. over Fish Creek, the Final Design Report has been submitted to New York State and has been approved. The next step is to prepare the bid letting documents and get Federal Authorization of funds at which time we will be able to advertise for bids. In addition, the right of way acquisition process has begun. I remain optimistic that construction will begin and be completed in the 2010 construction season.

I would like to thank everyone for your cooperation this past construction season. Several paving and drainage jobs have been completed in the past year. I apologize for any inconvenience they may have caused.

The Employees of the Highway Dept. wish everyone a Safe and Happy Holiday Season.

Drive Carefully

Water/Sewer Department News Melvin Denny, Water/Sewer/Grounds Superintendent 795-9919



BEFORE YOU DIG - Please remember to call for underground utility location before you do any digging. The toll free number is **1-800-962-7962, or 811**. It is the law that you must call and request **at least 2 full working days in advance** so that underground utilities have a chance to mark out their respective lines.

DOUBLE CHECK BACKFLOW PREVENTION DEVICES - These devices are required on all new construction and when there is a change of property owner. Final readings for property sold will include inspection for the double check valve. All irrigation meters must have backflow prevention devices.

WATER SUPPLY SECURITY - In an effort to protect our water supply from vandalism the Water Department is asking everyone to be vigilant and report any suspicious activity around fire hydrants or anything that may involve the water system. Please call me during the workweek at 795-9919 or at home at 795-9303. If I am not available, please call the Sheriff's Dept. – 911.

FIRE HYDRANTS - For your safety and that of your neighbors, please keep the fire hydrant by your house clear of trees, shrubs and snow. This is crucial in case of a fire and for the maintenance of the hydrant. New York State law requires a minimum of 3 feet of clearance.

TOWN EMPLOYEE IDENTIFICATION - If anyone comes to your door saying he is from this department and needs access to your house regarding your water or sewer, he will be driving a marked Town of Somerset truck and will have Town employee identification. If this is not the case, do not let them in and call this Department immediately at 795-9919.

NEW RADIO READ METERS – Over the next couple of years, the Water Department will continue replacing your water meter with a radio read meter. These meters will record your reading into a computer as the employee drives by your house with a special device. As we purchase new meters, the Water Department will be calling to replace your meter.

HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HEAP)

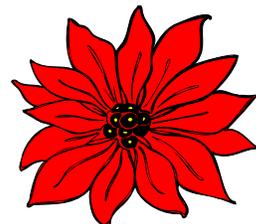
HEAP is a federally funded program designed to assist eligible households in meeting their home energy needs. The program is administered by the Department of Social Services. Eligibility is based on household income and your housing situation. An eligible housing situation means that you must either pay directly for heating costs or must pay rent that includes heating costs. Individual applicants must be US citizens or qualified aliens. Applications are available at local Department of Social Services offices, Niagara County Office for the Aging, or electronically download a printable version of the application from the internet at

<https://www.otda.state.ny.us/otdaheap/>

You can also stop by the Town Hall to pick up an application or for more details.

Niagara County Department of Social Services
HEAP Dept.
20 East Avenue
P.O. Box 506
Lockport, NY 14095-0506
Monday—Friday 8:00AM—3:45PM
439-7744

Applicants **age 60 or over** should send the completed application to the Office for the Aging at 111 Main Street, Suite 101, Lockport NY 14094 (phone 438-4023)



Thank You from Councilman Gow

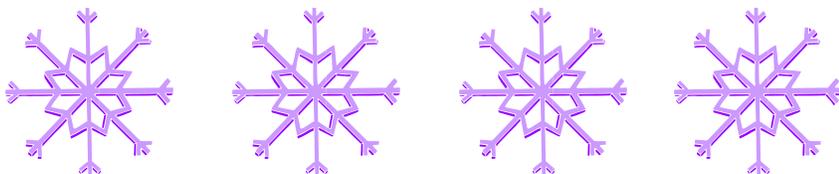
I would like to thank the residents of Somerset for your support over the last seventeen years that I served as councilman. It has been an honor for me to represent you and listen to your concerns.

Somerset is a very special and unique town, and certainly one I have been proud to be a part of as a resident of 34 years. Somerset’s fiscal responsibility and the responsiveness of Town Board members impressed me from the beginning and I wanted to continue that tradition. The Somerset Town Board has always welcomed attendance and input from residents at every meeting and it is more important than ever to keep the communication lines open. Voters must make themselves heard at EVERY level of government. Unlike State and Federal representatives, our board members are accessible by telephone, email, at the grocery store, the Barker Mall, church, and on the street. Please get to know your local officials and feel free to ask questions. It helps us to do a better job for the whole community.

Councilman Chaffee Thanks You

As the year 2009 closes, so does my tenure as your councilman. Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving you on the town board in the Great Town of Somerset. The 28 years that I served on the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Town Board have been personally rewarding and hopefully beneficial for the Town as a whole. As I leave town service I strongly encourage all residents to become involved in our town government.

Thank you sincerely,
Dudley Chaffee



What's Next! By Supervisor Richard Meyers

There have been monumental achievements in 2009 for the Town of Somerset and its residents, and I expect substantial progress in looking forward to 2010. To begin, The Somerset Government Efficiency Committee has been tasked to continue reviewing how we operate as a government. It is our goal to ensure that the tax dollars that are received from our residents are used wisely and prudently. We commit to provide the best services at the lowest cost to you as a taxpayer. We will be looking at health insurance costs, consolidation and/or sharing of services as well as a complete review of our spending habits and budgeting practices.

I will be appointing a new committee in January of 2010 to assess the business climate in Somerset. The committee will make the necessary recommendations to develop an atmosphere that will encourage the health of businesses located in the Town of Somerset and the Village of Barker. The committee will also be tasked with pursuing additional business that will fit in with our community. We will pursue business that will provide jobs for our residents, a diverse tax base for our Town and Village governments, and will have a complementary relationship with the businesses that currently call Somerset home.

There has already been a concerted effort to bring the Town of Somerset into the technology of the 21st century and 2010 will continue on that path. We are currently working with Time-Warner Cable and the Federal Government to bring additional broadband (high-speed internet) to a greater part of our town. For all of you who currently have to wait for your computer to start-up or download, we hope to have some good news sometime in 2010.

Another program we are reviewing is the newly passed Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) loans program. The PACE program allows municipalities to offer residential and commercial property owners loans for renewable energy or energy conservation improvements to their properties, and the loans stay with the property, getting paid back as a separate item on tax bills. The PACE loan program can help eliminate the up-front cost of paying for a solar or wind energy system, or for conservation measures, because they can be financed through low interest, long term loans. It also reduces concern about the payback period. Many home owners can't move forward on renewable energy systems or conservation projects because they don't know how long they will be living in their home. The PACE bill provides for the loan to be attached to the property so that if a property owner moves, payments continue to be made by the new owner, who would be benefiting from the savings that accrue from the free energy produced by the renewable system, or energy saved through conservation. There will be more on this and other initiatives in future editions of the Somerset Newsletter.

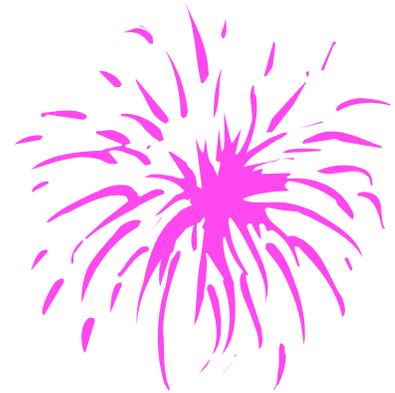
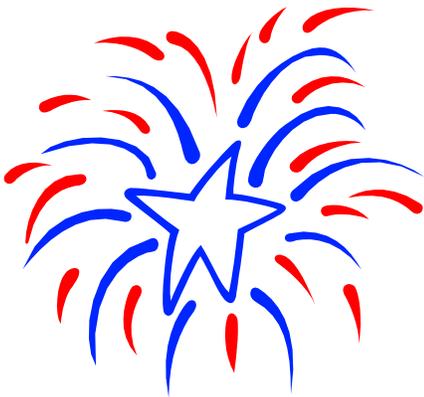
In closing, I would like to wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Congratulations Barker Central School District!

This school year is not even half over and we have already seen great accomplishments that deserve recognition! For the first time ever, Barker Central School has a State Championship sports team! The Barker Cross Country team won the title last month at SUNY Plattsburgh. The team consists of runners Mike Lantinen, Eric Bennes, Tyler Scheving, Ryan Lamb, Jed Platt, Matthew Sweeney and David Poyfair, and is coached by Paul Dersarkissian and Sharon Lamb. Coach Dersarkissian also was awarded All WNY Coach of the Year! Congratulations team!

We also just learned that Barker Central School was awarded the Bronze Medal by US News & World Report! Barker is the only school district in Niagara County to be ranked one of the **Best 100 schools** in NYS! They analyzed 21,786 public high schools in 48 states plus the District of Columbia. Test performance is considered to determine whether each school's students were performing better than statistically expected for the average student in the state. Then they determine whether the school's least-advantaged students were performing better than average for similar students in the state. The third criteria is college readiness. This data can be found at www.usnews.com. Congratulations Barker Central School District!



NOTICE

We have been informed that several residents have received a mailing from a company regarding insuring the water pipe and sewer line to your home. The Town of Somerset **DOES NOT ENDORSE** any insurance company. Please investigate before you purchase any insurance to protect your lines. If you have any questions, please call the Water Department at 795-9919.



BARKER FIRE DEPT. **By CHIEF RANDY HILDEBRANT**



Winter is among us. And as we've enjoyed the mild days, we will surely be experiencing its inevitable cold grip soon. This is also the time of year that we use our alternative heating devices, wood stoves and fireplaces. I would like to remind those of you who use fireplaces and woodstoves, to have your chimneys cleaned and inspected yearly BEFORE using your stove. A chimney fire happens quickly and without warning. They can burn inside your walls for hours without detection. They're especially dangerous when no one's home. By the time the fire's discovered, it's usually too late to save the home.

Another problem and the cause of many house fires, is the use of power strips. Power strips are being used more and more these days especially during the holidays. The problem is that people overload these devices with appliances that require too much electricity causing the power strips to overload. Regardless of internal circuit breakers, these devices still fail. If you're going to use them, DO NOT plug in any more appliances than the strip can handle. Be sure that the power strip has a UL label and has been tested. The \$1.99 power strips at discount stores ARE NOT SAFE. Many of these strips do not have the safety features that are required by the Underwriters Laboratories. Homemade and obsolete power strips are very common and also very dangerous. An old, obsolete and overloaded power strip caused the fire that destroyed the apartment building on Lockport-Olcott Rd in the Town of Newfane during the past summer.

Please keep your home safe from fire. Be sure you have smoke alarms in your home and be sure the batteries are good. Educate EVERYONE in the use of a fire extinguisher. Establish escape routes and meeting places and practice them with everyone who lives in your home. Restrict or limit the use of candles and NEVER let them burn unattended.

As always, the members of the Barker Fire Dept are here to assist our residents in the practice of fire prevention. If you need us to help you establish a fire escape plan or any other fire prevention matter, do not hesitate to call me at 471-6080 at anytime. Myself or one of our firefighters will be happy to come to your home and assist you.

On behalf of myself and the men and women of the Barker Fire Dept., we wish you a very merry and safe holiday.

A reminder that you can order reflective address markers for only \$12. These markers help make your address visible day or night, and help emergency responders find your house. Order forms are available at the Town Hall. This service is provided by the Junior Firefighters.



HISTORIAN'S CORNER

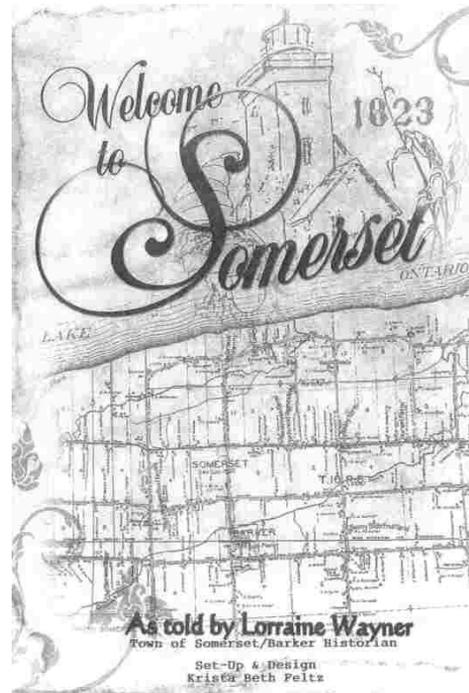
By: Lorraine Wayner 795-3575

Are you curious? Do you wonder about different things in Somerset, how they originated? Do you like history?

I have just completed a book..... "Welcome to Somerset" all you ever wanted to know about Somerset and Barker. It is in the final stages of its long journey. Krista Beth Feltz is working on the "Set and Design", doing a terrific job. With lots of stories and pictures it is going to be a product to be proud of.

It has been a time-consuming project and I will be very happy to see it completed. Where will it be available and what will it cost? All these questions will be answered shortly.

I usually write a story of interest in the newsletter but with such a precious time of year so close I felt a short note would do the job. To everyone.... My Wishes for A Happy Holiday Season with Blessings to all.



GRANTS AVAILABLE! The Niagara Community Action Program's Rural Preservation Program is a housing assistance program designed to improve the housing stock in rural Niagara County. They offer **Home Repair Grants** for home improvements such as roofs, septic systems, foundation walls, doors, windows, siding, etc.; Grants and **Low-Interest Loans for new construction** and repairs to your home; **Weatherization Programs** to improve the energy efficiency of your home; and links to other agencies that can offer additional services. They have money available and are looking for qualified Somerset residents to assist. You qualify if you are a Somerset resident and you own your home or trailer, meet income guidelines, have your property taxes paid, and your home is a single family, owner-occupied home. They also have a **Home Accessibility Program** that provides grants for the following: Ramps, lifts and other measures to permit access to existing residential housing units from the exterior of the building; Kitchen and bathroom modifications in existing residential units to provide access to persons with mobility limitations or disabling conditions; and devices to permit use of an existing home by persons with hearing or visual impairments. This program requires the same qualifications listed above, and you must have homeowners insurance. Please contact them to see if you qualify! **Phone 434-4679 or email: ruralpreservation@verizon.net**



CODE ENFORCEMENT**By Randy Hildebrant 795-9556**

As of January 1, 2010, I will have to start requiring residents to obtain a Building Permit for all re-roofing jobs. The New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code require that all residential re-roofing projects must meet the Code. There are some exceptions to this and they can be found by going to the NYS Dept. of State website at www.dos.state.ny.us. Once there, click on "Code Enforcement Administration". That link will take you to the free version of the 2007 Codes. Go to "Residential Codes", Chapter 9, Section R907. This will explain what's required for re-roofing a residential home. The cost of the permit will be \$20.00 and it will be valid for one (1) year from the date of issue.

Also as a reminder, all wood burning stoves, chimneys, fireplaces and outdoor wood boilers require a permit in the Town of Somerset. Insurance companies call this office on a regular basis inquiring on residents that have "alternative heating devices" and if they've been inspected.

The NYS Fire Code requires me to do fire inspections on places of public assembly annually. However, if any resident would like an inspection done on their home, please call my office at 795-9556. I would be more than happy to come to your residence and assist you with fire prevention, escape routes, inspections or check the operation of smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. There is no charge for this service. Being involved in the fire service for over 25 years has made me aware of the dangers of fire in our homes and has made me realize how important it is to share this information with all of our residents.

If you have any questions on building and zoning issues or would like information on fire prevention, please don't hesitate to call my office at 795-9556. I will be happy to assist you.

I WISH YOU AND YOUR FAMILY A SAFE AND HAPPY HOLIDAY!!!!



Our smoke detector giveaway program was very successful! We still have smoke detectors available so if you are in need of a detector, please stop by the town hall.

Assessor's Office 795-3243

*By Randy Hildebrant – Chairman
Bob Glidden
John Keough*

As a reminder to our residents, taxable status day is March 1, 2010. All exemptions need to be filed with the Assessors Office no later than 4:30pm March 1, 2010 in order to be eligible for the 2010 tax roll. The Assessors Office will be going through and contacting people who have not yet renewed their exemptions. Exemptions that need renewing are ALL Agricultural Exemptions (land, not building), Senior Aged exemption and anyone with the Enhanced Star exemption that is not participating in the NYS Income Verification Program. If you have any questions about any of these exemptions or any other exemption, please don't hesitate in contacting the Assessors Office at 795-3243.

Also, there has been a lot of confusion in regards to the Basic Star program and the Star Rebate Program. Gov. Patterson has stopped the Star REBATE program, not the Basic Star Program. The rebate program was the program where the state was sending rebate checks back to anyone who was benefiting from the Basic Star and the Enhanced Star programs. These programs are still active, however the rebates are not.

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Fax: 716-795-9041
Website: www.somersetny.org



Don't forget about our Drop Box! For the convenience of our residents we have placed a mailbox by the sidewalk. If you stop to pay a bill after hours you can place it in the mail box. Although the box is locked, PLEASE do not deposit cash in the box.



Holiday Magic

Upcoming Events Calendar

- Dec 19th 10AM—Children's Christmas Party at the Barker Fire Hall
- Dec 25th—Merry Christmas
- Jan 1st—Happy 2010
- Jan 5th—Town Board Meeting 7:30PM
- Jan 12th—Town Board Meeting 7:30PM
- Jan 13th—Planning Board Meeting 7:30PM

The Library has new computers for your use! Please stop in and check them out. Library hours are:

- Monday 10AM—5PM
- Tuesday 10AM—8PM
- Wednesday Closed
- Thursday 10AM—8PM
- Friday 10AM—5PM
- Saturday 10AM—1PM