

Binghamton street projects yield \$300,000 in savings

In-house work, recycling cut costs

Press & Sun-Bulletin, June 30, 2011

BINGHAMTON -- Anyone traveling in the city this summer might think of it as an inconvenience.

City officials don't disagree, but they're also quick to point out that the 29 streets being milled and paved over the next few months are being done at a savings of about \$300,000.

"Every penny we save ... keeps costs down and taxes down," Mayor Matthew T. Ryan said Wednesday at the corner of Mary Street and Morgan Road, where a milling and paving project was under way. "We're trying to save as much as we can, so cuts won't be as steep next year."

About 5 1/2 miles of streets throughout the city -- and in every city council district -- are getting a facelift this year. Last year, the city milled and paved 4.9 miles.

The savings were about 30 percent of the paving project's \$1 million price tag, Ryan said.

A key element was doing some of the work in-house using Department of Public Works employees, rather than sending it to outside contractors, according to Department of Public Works Commissioner Luke Day.

DPW Deputy Commissioner Pat Torrico pointed to additional changes that are helping keep costs down: improved integration between the Streets Bureau and the Engineering Department, investment in paving equipment and recycling millings.

Those recycled millings are projected to generate nearly \$90,000 in additional revenue.

Every \$350,000 in savings represents roughly 1 percent of taxes. However, residents shouldn't expect to see an impact on their tax bill just yet.

"We can't return it to the taxpayers," said Councilman Sean Massey, D-5th Ward. "Nothing we do this year can have an impact on this year's tax break, but it can on next year's."

Ryan noted that the money saved is being put back into the paving budget.

A milling and paving project on Mary Street next to Ross Park served as the backdrop for the announcement. The project had caused a traffic back-up earlier in the day.

An "inconvenience that's a price for progress," was Ryan's view of the construction backup.

PAVING PROJECTS

1st Ward (Robert Weslar)

Spruce Street (Spring Forest Avenue to Cypress Street)

Oak Street (Dickinson Street to Prospect Street)

Jarvis Street (Clinton Street to Field Street)

2nd Ward (Martin J. Gerchman)

Gay Street (Bellevue Heights to Orton Avenue)

Helen Street (Jerome Avenue to Schubert Street)

Briar Court (Riverside Drive to Leroy Street)

Crary Avenue (Harrison Street to Schubert Street)

Bellevue Heights (Schubert Street to Gay Street)

Leroy Street (Chestnut Street to Beethoven Street)

Kneeland Avenue (Leroy Street to Riverside Drive)

3rd Ward (Teri Renna)

Murray Street (Riverside Drive to Vincent Street)

Seminary Avenue (Oak Street to Chestnut Street)

4th Ward (Lea Webb)

Carrol Street (Hawley Street to Route 363)

Court Street (Centenary Street to Chapman Street)

5th Ward (Sean Massey)

Ivanhoe Road (Vestal Avenue to Clifton Boulevard)

Mary Street (Richard Street to Woodland Avenue)

Mary Street (Woodland Avenue to Morgan Road)

Christopher Street (Mary Street to Midwood Drive)

East Hampton Road (City Line to City Line)

Dogwood Drive (East Hampton Road to City Line)

6th Ward (Charles Kramer)

Espial Drive (City Line to Circuit Street)

Evelyn Place (Esther Avenue to McNamara Avenue)

Rollins Street (Lookout Street to Vestal Avenue)

Conklin Avenue (John Street to Tompkins Street)

7th Ward (Edward M. Collins)

Robinson Street (Broad Street to Fairview Avenue)

Clapham Street (Fairview Avenue to East Clapham Street)

East Frederick Street (Moeller Street to Bigelow Street)

Harding Avenue (City Line to End)

Newton Street (End to End)

Crime spurs run for council

Binghamton's Matzo vows 'zero tolerance' for illegal drugs

Press & Sun-Bulletin, July 1, 2011

BINGHAMTON -- Lifelong Binghamton resident and political newcomer John Matzo announced on Monday his intention to run for the 6th Ward council seat now held by Charles Kramer. Kramer has reached his term limit.

Matzo, 52, of Homer Street, cited the decline of his neighborhood as a reason for running.

"I'm tired of all the crime in my neighborhood," said Matzo, describing a murder that had occurred around the corner. "I'm tired of complaining about it, and nothing gets done."

People have thrown stones at his business, Matzo Electric Signs Inc. on Homer Street, damaging windows and doors. Pumpkins were thrown through the windows of his house.

He plans to cut down on drugs and petty crimes by strengthening the neighborhood watch program. He also pledged to work with code enforcement to get landlords to improve the quality of life in their buildings.

"I'm going to have zero tolerance in this city," he said. "That's what it comes down to with these drugs."

Matzo, who is divorced, has two daughters: Shannon, 23, who recently graduated from Broome Community College with an engineering science degree, and Aimee, 16, a rising senior at Susquehanna Valley High School.

Matzo is going door to door in the 6th ward to meet residents and gauge their concerns.

"People are afraid to answer their doors," he said. "I'd like to try to make this city back to what it was (in the 1960s and '70s) when downtown Binghamton was beautiful."

Binghamton girl's dreams come true thanks to Make-A-Wish

Press & Sun-Bulletin, July 10, 2011

BINGHAMTON -- Tinker Bell's fairy dust is spreading to the Southern Tier and giving one girl a chance to experience the magic.

The Make-A-Wish foundation's Central New York branch will turn Chelsie Whitman's wish to meet Tinker Bell at Walt Disney World into a reality later this month.

"I was bouncing up and down and bouncing all over the walls screaming," said Chelsie, 13, of Binghamton, when she found out her wish was granted. "Tinker Bell is just one of my favorite people ever and I'm like a little kid inside."

Her parents, Jack and Tammy Whitman, were equally ecstatic.

"We jumped up and down in the living room and just screaming happiness," Tammy Whitman said.

Chelsie was diagnosed with chronic Autoimmune Hepatitis, where her body's immune system attacks her liver, in October 2009. She travels to Syracuse every three to six months for doctor's appointments. Decisions on her medications and treatment are handled out of New York City in conjunction with her Syracuse doctor, Tammy Whitman said.

Jack Whitman referred his daughter to the foundation, which grants wishes for children with life-threatening medical conditions, last year, according to Olivia Colabufo, the branch's manager of program services.

"Some other wishes were to stay in a beach house right on the beach, and my other one was to meet Taylor Lautner," Chelsie said.

Lautner, an actor, is known for his role as lead werewolf Jacob Black in the "Twilight" movie franchise.

Actress Anna Sophia Robb, who most recently starred in the movie "Soul Surfer," sponsored Chelsie's gift. Robb took part in a foundation fundraiser sponsored by the movie's producers in April.

"I was so happy that I went out and watched every movie that she was ever filmed in," Chelsie said.

Concert by 'iCarly' star expected to draw big crowd at Spiedie Fest

Cosgrove among several musical acts on this year's lineup

Press & Sun-Bulletin, July 15, 2011

DICKINSON -- A Nickelodeon star is bypassing the usual Spiedie Fest meet-and-greets and heading straight for the main stage.

Miranda Cosgrove, star of the Nickelodeon show "iCarly," will headline the 2011 Spiedie Fest & Balloon Rally, which runs Aug. 5-7 at Otsiningo Park. Just 18, Cosgrove is poised to draw a big crowd at her Saturday evening concert, event organizers said.

"Never in 27 years have we had so many calls on entertainment because of Miranda Cosgrove," said event coordinator David Pessagno, who noted they had sent buttons as far away as Florida and Virginia so people could come see the show. "I'm told she has great energy on stage."

Shane Harper will open for Cosgrove. Other musical acts appearing include rocker Eddie Money on Friday; two-time Grammy nominee Mandisa, who will play the Hope Tent on Sunday afternoon; and country artist Chris Young on Sunday night. Meet-and-greet guests include former Yankees player Joe Pepitone and Disney Channel "Camp Rock" star Alyson Stoner on Saturday, and Deuce from Disney Channel's "Shake it Up" on Sunday.

New this year is the HP Hood Family Fun Tent, which has free activities for children such as face painting, balloon twisting and a battle of the bands, Pessagno said. The Hope Tent is also being remade into a "chill spot" for teenagers with couches, foosball and billiards for free, said Keli Cooper of the Hope Tent.

Pessagno is promising a bigger antique car and truck show, more vendors, and even a new shark hot-air balloon. Six hundred people have already registered for Sunday's Kelly LaBare 5k Road Race/Walk, and overall attendance is usually around 100,000, organizers said.

Admission buttons for all three days including concerts are \$20 and can be purchased at various locations, including Wegmans, Weis Markets, Cost Cutters and the Oakdale Mall, until 6 p.m. Aug. 5. Tickets for one day only are \$8 at the gate and do not include concert admission. Children 7 and under get in free.

For a full list of participating stores, visit www.spiediefest.com.

Middle-schoolers go green at BU program

Science combined with environmental sustainability is taught

Patrick Comerford pedaled an energy bicycle to power a fluorescent light bulb Wednesday at the Southern Tier Go Green Institute summer program at Binghamton University. LISA KASHINSKY / STAFF PHOTO

Press & Sun-Bulletin, July 17, 2011

BINGHAMTON -- Patrick Comerford hopped on a stationary bicycle and started pedaling. In less than a minute, the energy generated from the bike had illuminated a fluorescent light bulb, and Comerford's face lit up.

This was one of many scientific activities at the Southern Tier Go Green Institute at Binghamton University, which started last week and ends Friday.

"It was really fun," said Comerford, a Vestal Middle School student. "It was just like a little bit of energy that could do so much."

In its fourth year, the 10-day program gives 55 eighth-graders the chance to explore math, science and engineering, and how they relate to environmental sustainability, said program director and BU chemistry professor Wayne Jones. Participants work with BU faculty and graduate students, Broome Community College faculty, and middle school teachers in the university's labs, greenhouses, and Center of Excellence.

"It's really fun to meet new people from other schools and ... to learn more about science and math than you would in normal school," said Maine-Endwell student Ashlen Wright.

Participants are selected from the top one percent of local students with the highest state test scores in math and science.

"It's a pretty motivated group to say the least," said Jones.

Students rotate through three tracks -- math and engineering; physical sciences; and life sciences. They do activities such as synthesizing nylon and observing the magnifying power of the Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) said team leader and BCC chemistry professor Dan Brennan.

They also work on sustainability-oriented research projects to present at the end of camp. Comerford said his project is to turn recyclable materials such as cracker boxes into musical instruments.

"It's hard to find really motivated kids in math and science," said Kevin Dartt, who works with the program. "Around this age they're going into social situations and it's good for them to know that there are other people out there like them -- academically motivated."

Phew! 95-degree reading breaks 1955 record

Heat index hits 106 in parts of Broome County

Press & Sun-Bulletin, July 22, 2011

BINGHAMTON -- It's been two days of excessive heat for the Southern Tier, and area residents will have to wait a little while longer for a reprieve.

Whether that's good news or bad depends on your heat tolerance.

A high of 95 degrees Thursday at the Greater Binghamton Airport broke the daily record of 91 set in 1955, according to the National Weather Service. The all-time record of 98 degrees was set on July 16, 1988.

By 4:30 p.m., the airport's heat index had reached 102 degrees, meteorologist Mike Nadolski said.

"We've had places here in Broome County where it's reached 105 to 106," he said.

Temperatures in the valley were around 98 degrees, consistent with the usual degree difference due to altitude, weather service meteorologists said.

Area residents took notice.

The Vestal Rail Trail and Binghamton University tennis courts -- usually popular spots -- were devoid of people at one point Thursday afternoon.

Teenagers at the Binghamton Tennis Center braved the heat as part of their summer camp session.

"A few parents withheld their children from tennis camps because of the potential for excessive heat," office manager Tracy Sladish said. "But overall, camps were well-attended."

The Broome County Health Department and the weather service recommended people drink plenty of water and stay in air-conditioned buildings Thursday.

To help on that front, the Health Department and the American Red Cross set up two cooling stations at Sts. Cyril & Methodius Church Hall in Binghamton and the Endwell Fire Station at Hooper and Country Club roads. The stations offered seats, water, ice and air conditioning, though no one seemed to be taking advantage of the offer Thursday afternoon.

As of early afternoon Thursday, there hadn't been any reports of people being admitted to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital for heat-related issues.

"The emergency department is expecting they will see some increase in the next day or two," Lisa Donovan, media relations coordinator for the hospital, said in an e-mail.

Business was good at the Manley's Mighty Mart near Vestal Senior High School, which saw an increase in ice sales because of the heat.

"We've sold 75 bags of ice so far today," employee Mandy Howe said Thursday. "We usually sell 20 to 30 on a good day."

Some residents were also without power Thursday morning around the county. NYSEG reported outages for 5,283 customers near its Morningside and Chenango Bridge substations, and the Chenango Valley tap.

A tree fell onto the lines, causing the outage, said NYSEG spokesman Bob Pass.

"All customers were back on in under an hour," he said.

As for a look ahead: Today will be sunny, with a high of 94 degrees; Saturday will be mostly sunny and humid, with a high of 92 degrees. Sunday, there is the chance for a late-day storm, with a high of a somewhat cooler 87 degrees.

Officials in Broome County say mandated street-sign replacement too costly

Federal rules could cost municipalities tens of thousands of dollars

Press & Sun-Bulletin, Monday, August 15, 2011

Making street signs more reflective and easier to read sounds like a good idea in theory. In practice, however, local municipalities are finding there's just not enough money to make the changes.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued new rules in 2008 -- published in its 864-page December 2009 Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices -- stating municipalities had until January 2015 to increase the retroreflectivity of regulatory, warning and ground-mounted guide signs, and until January 2018 to increase the retroreflectivity of overhead guide and street-name signs to meet new requirements.

That means that signs that essentially do not look the same color and shape in headlights at night as they do during the day must be replaced.

Sign retroreflectivity degrades over time, and the FHWA is recommending all signs past their "expected sign life," based on age and retroreflectivity degradation, should be replaced.

"Right now it'd be a huge expense," said Susan Brown, Broome County's deputy commissioner of highways. "There's no way to get funding. They just kind of mandate it and then you have to do it."

According to Conklin Highway Superintendent Pat Latting, every sign in the town, from street-name signs to stop signs to curve signs, has to be changed to meet the higher standards. More than 100 stop signs have already been changed, and Latting is tackling dead-end and sharp-turn signs next.

The price tag for Conklin to make the changes is around \$30,000, and it's only that low because the town is doing most of the work in-house to save money.

"Good luck because no one's got any money to do it," Latting said, noting the town is trying to make adjustments in both its 2011 and 2012 budgets for sign replacement. Brock Leonard, Vestal's highway superintendent, said the town has talked about changing its signs. It remains just talk because funds aren't available.

"We talked about going to a different type of material that's more high-vision," he said. "We haven't heard anything about any kind of money that we could get from the state. I don't have the money to change every sign in this town."

FHWA regulations picked up by the state also said lettering for names of places, streets and highways on conventional road-guide signs have to be made with the first letter of

each name in uppercase and all subsequent letters lowercase. There is no set compliance date for the lettering. The FHWA recommends replacing the signs only on an as-needed basis.

"Street signs by 2018 have to be 12 inches tall with 6-inch lettering to contain both upper- and lower case lettering," Brown said. "If it's upper- and lowercase, people, more so the elderly, will be able to read them earlier."

The new mandates mean the end of the yellow-with-black-lettering street-name signs in the Town of Windsor. Started over 20 years ago by town highway supervisor Richard Kholbach, the signs are in honor of the Windsor school district's colors, black and gold. Replacing each sign and post -- in order to make the posts more "crashworthy," according to the FHWA -- won't be cheap.

"It's going to probably be around \$200 (each) for breakaway posts and street signs," Kholbach said.

Because of a lack of funding, the county is only replacing street-name signs on an as-needed basis or because of damage. New signs have been put up at the Route 11 end of Chenango Road in the Town of Chenango and Knapp Hill Road in the Town of Barker, according to Brown. Three new signs will also be put up on Ahern, Smith and Stevens roads in Conklin.

"Right now it's wait-and-see because, originally, the mandate was that everything had to be 12 inches and 6 inches and all uppercase," Brown said. "As they go along they keep changing it, so at this point, we're going to wait and see what they're going to do in the end."