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ON TOPIC

On Topic is designed to bring you pertinent information about Peekskill, Cortlandt, and Yorktown in greater detail than conventional media coverage can provide. On Topic will highlight influential people, special events, and historical information. As the County Legislator for Norther Westchester, John will also keep viewers up to date on the latest issues that affect the local municipalities and residents of Northern Westchester, NY. All On Topic shows are video streamed in their entirety through this site. If you are unable to watch our shows on cable television, you can see them by selecting the link in the column to the left. We hope you enjoy watching our programs. Please don't hesitate to offer any suggestions for future shows. We are always looking for interesting topics to cover. ■

IMPORTANT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Back in July, I announced the passage of \$2.4 million in Bond Acts for rehabilitation and upgrades to a stretch of South Division St. and Crompond Rd. in the City of Peekskill. I was joined by all Legislators present in a 15-0 unanimous vote in favor of the Bonds. As Mayor and as a County Legislator I have advocated for capital improvements to the city's infrastructure. Ensuring the maintenance of our roads and bridges is an important responsibility for elected officials at every level. I am grateful to my fellow Legislators for joining me in voting for this very important funding package. This rehabilitation will ensure the safety of both the riding and walking public along this key artery in our community. In addition to the safety improvements, this work will contribute to the vitality of the business that operate in this area and are essential to the economic well-being of Peekskill, Cortlandt and the rest of northern

Westchester County. The project will rehabilitate and bring much needed upgrades to a 1.38 mile section of this commercially-critical thoroughfare for northern Westchester County which is travelled by nearly 12,000 cars per day. The work will include, but not be limited to, milling the existing asphalt, resurfacing and concrete curb replacement, installation of handicap ramps, new traffic loops, new pavement markings, replacement of utility castings and other related work. The South Division St.-Crompond Rd. project is the latest phase in an ongoing effort to rehabilitate and improve several critical roadways in the City. Last Year, Legislator Testa was able to secure \$2.8 million through a similar Bond Act for the rehabilitation of East and West Main St. in Peekskill from Route 9 to Conklin Avenue. The County is now completing the bid process for that project and work will begin this summer. ■



John G. Testa

District 1 ~ Buchanan, Peekskill, Yorktown



MUCH NEEDED RENOVATIONS FOR YORKTOWN SENIORS

In my last newsletter, I told you about funding from the county that we secured to help with the major renovations at the Yorktown Seniors Center. The funds from the county, combined with some private donations and \$300,000 from the Town all made the \$500,000 project possible. I am happy to say that those renovations are complete and they are a wonderful improvement. I was honored to be invited to the ribbon cutting ceremony where I got to see some old friends and make some new ones.

Renovations included more doors for improved access, new windows to allow for natural light, new tiles and painting, upgraded heating and air conditioning and a folding partition to make it possible to divide the recreation room for smaller gatherings. The center offers nutrition programs, home meals, grocery shopping, a wellness program and transportation to medical appointments for the seniors in Yorktown. Our seniors are a very important segment of our society and I value the time and I spend with them and the wisdom and knowledge that they have offered me throughout my career and life. ■



A VICTORY FOR THE PEOPLE OF WESTCHESTER

In 2009 the NYS Legislature passed the MTA Mobility or Payroll Tax on the businesses, municipalities, school districts, hospitals and not-for-profits in what is known as the Metropolitan Commuter Transit District (MCTD). The MCTD is essentially the 12 county area covered by the MTA from Long Island to the Hudson Valley. This MTA "Bailout" Tax, as it has become known, imposed a \$.34 tariff on every \$100 of payroll in order to raise \$1.5 billion annually for the MTA. On August 22nd NYS Supreme Court Judge R. Bruce Cozzens Jr. ruled this tax as unconstitutional for violating the New York State Constitution. This was the result of a lawsuit brought on originally by Nassau County. In August of 2010, as County Legislator, I spearheaded the effort to have Westchester County join the suit as Putnam County had recently done. My colleagues on the Westchester County Board of Legislators unanimously agreed with me and voted to direct the County Attorney to have Westchester join the suit. County Executive Astorino agreed and also directed the County Attorney to officially join Nassau's suit. In the end Nassau, Suffolk, Putnam and Westchester Counties were plaintiffs in the lawsuit along with 17 villages and towns scattered across the Hudson Valley. After weighing the facts of the case of how this tax came to be



enacted, Judge Cozzens determined that the vote used to create the tax was not in compliance with the Constitution of the State of New York. The reason is that the state legislature violated the home rule provision required with this type of legislation. Which means that since this tax was to be imposed on only 12 of New York's 62 counties it would require a home rule message from those affected. That was not done. Additionally, in the absence of a home rule message the law required a two-thirds vote of the entire NYS Legislature. This was not accomplished either. On August 23, 2012 I joined fellow state, county and local elected officials praising Judge Cozzens' decision on the MTA Tax. As a result of this ruling we are also calling for the retroactive reimbursement for payments that have been made since this unconstitutional law was enacted. Although the MTA has stated it will "vigorously appeal" the ruling we are confident the NYS Constitution and the Judge Cozzens' ruling will prevail. ■

IN SUPPORT OF OUR VETERANS

It was a true honor to participate in the American Legion Post No. 274 event today when they renamed themselves the Oliver C. Chase Jr. American Legion Post No. 274. U.S. Air Force Captain Oliver C. Chase Jr., a lifelong Peekskill resident and 1950 PHS Graduate, gave his life on July 22, 1965 when he piloted his plane directly into a combat zone to protect his comrades on the ground as they readied to retake a fort in Dong Xoai from 2,000 Viet Cong guerrillas. Captain Chase was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by the US Air Force in 1965. He was 33 years old and left a wife and 5 children. His three sons joined the military and one of his two daughters married an Air Force navigator. The Chase family has truly been one that personifies service to country. I hope this act begins a long overdue movement to properly thank and recognize all those who served in Viet Nam. They deserve it. ■



After participating in Yorktown's Veterans Day Parade in Shrub Oak on Sunday November 11th I was honored to thank our area veterans at the Cortlandt and Peekskill ceremonies on Monday the 12th. The keynote speakers were tremendous at all three events with very poignant and moving speeches. I was especially proud to be able to publicly welcome home and thank all our Vietnam Veterans. This year marks the 50th anniversary of that war and they have never received the welcome home and thank you they deserve. We have also seen a number of troops returning to our communities from Iraq and as our military presence in Afghanistan is drawn down we will see more troops coming home from there too. Please look for ways you can support those troops to show them our support. God Bless our veterans! ■



Back in June, I joined Veterans from across the region at a rally in front of the Montrose VA campus. The VA had put the campus under something called an "Enhanced Use Lease Plan" which would have allowed them to re-designate part of the campus to allow for things like private developers to build condos there. Those of us that rallied there argued that we should not be taking away from our veterans but in fact we should be expanding and enhancing the services that are currently available at the Montrose VA. Thankfully that plan will not move forward which is a great victory for Veterans in Westchester and Putnam. We must remain vigilant, however, about VA. Our senior veterans need a fully operational facility close to their homes and younger veterans who are now encountering issues like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and effects of undiagnosed Traumatic Brain Injuries need to have services that convenient and comprehensive. We will continue to fight for our veterans to have these services in Montrose. ■



COUNTY PARKS BOARD APPOINTMENT A GREAT HONOR

In June, I was appointed to the Westchester County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board. I am honored that my appointment was affirmed by a unanimous, 17-0 vote of my colleagues on the Board of Legislators. Anyone who has served in government with me knows, I have long been an ardent supporter and advocate for parks, conservation and the preservation of historic sites.

I am very gratified to have been appointed as the Board of Legislators representative to this very important and dedicated panel of citizens. I believe that Westchester County's open spaces, parks and historic sites are one of the true treasures that we have been blessed with and I am honored by the opportunity to help in the stewardship of those resources. Balancing things like commercial and

residential development with the conservation of open spaces is very important.

One of my passions is local history and I have turned that passion into establishing and preserving Peekskill's Lincoln Depot. I have also worked to create new public spaces and parks like, the 40-acre historic Fort Hill Park and the Annsville Trail Preserve along the Hudson River as well as overseeing the renovations of Franklin Park, Depew Park, Lepore Park, Riverfront Green, Tompkins Ball field and the historic restoration of the Paramount Center for the Arts.

As a County Legislator, I have fought for funding to improve County Parks like Blue Mountain Preserve in Peekskill/Cortlandt and George's Island in Montrose. I am honored to continue my commitment to our county's parks in this new role. ■

KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE

Abraham Lincoln's popularity has certainly been on the rise, especially at the box office. Of course we have been way ahead of Hollywood by many years in honoring this great President. On Saturday, September 29, 2012 the Lincoln Depot Foundation held an event to show the extensive progress on the restoration of the depot building. The unveiling of a special gift by local artist and lifetime Peekskill resident Bob Barthelmes and his wife Kay highlighted the event.

The gift was an original Southard-Roberson Peekskill pot belly stove Bob had purchased three decades earlier and had loaned it to the Peekskill Museum for display. The stove was one designed for use in such applications as a railroad depot and, in fact, was originally used in the railroad depot in Goshen, New York. Thanks to Bob and Kay's wonderful gift to the depot we will now have an original Peekskill stove included in



the restoration of the Station Master/Passenger section of the depot. Just as it was in 1861 when President-elect Lincoln stopped to address the residents of Peekskill.

Another special feature of the day's event came from State Senator Greg Ball, who represents the City of Peekskill in Albany. Senator Ball was able to secure a \$100,000 NYS grant for the depot project! This funding will go a long way in offsetting the costs of the restoration of the building and the creation of the Lincoln Depot Museum. ■

LEGISLATOR TESTA HELPS DELIVER OVER \$200,000 OF FUNDING FOR PEEKSKILL'S YOUTH

Back in June, I was joined by my colleagues on the BOL in voting to enter into an inter-municipal agreement (IMA) with the City of Peekskill to provide critical funding to the city's "Advancing Leadership for Teens" program. As a full time educator and former Mayor of Peekskill I am thrilled to be able to help bring this funding to the youth of Peekskill. I have dedicated my career to educating kids and preparing them for their future educational or career endeavors. The Advancing Leadership for Teens program and the City of Peekskill Youth Bureau is a wonderful partnership that was created not just for kids but with their direct input. While we have seen a lot of our community programs cut or even eliminated in municipalities across the county I am very gratified that we were able to arrive at this agreement between the county and the City of Peekskill. This is an investment in our greatest resource in Peekskill and Westchester, our kids, and it will pay great dividends far beyond the terms of the agreement. Under the terms of the IMA, the program would receive \$135,000 from Westchester County with the City of Peekskill providing \$72,693. The funding carries the program through 2014. The "Advancing Leadership for Teens" program was designed to address the needs of youth in Peekskill focusing on objectives like developing resumes and job seeking. Another primary focus will be college exploration and readiness. The program also aims to prevent health risk behaviors in kids by providing health education, community and cultural service projects, youth activism, academic and education services and dropout prevention. One of the most basic yet important aspects of the program is that it provides a constructive and safe atmosphere for youth outside of school. ■