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Creek Defenders clean up West Islip River

BY JAMES BERTSCH & NICOLE FUENTES

About 60 volunteers hauled 30 bags of debris from Sampawam's Creek at Save the Great South Bay's April 27 cleanup.

Volunteers collected everything, from bottles to gutters to motorcycles. And it isn't a cleanup until a volunteer comes rolling up with a few tires.

Save the Great South estimates they prevented 1,000 pounds of debris from going into the Great South Bay.

"The transformation was unbelievable," said Renée Bandes, director of science and engineering technology West Islip School District (K-12). Bandes spearheaded the effort for the school, showing students that West Islip's classroom extends well outside its walls. "When we first arrived," Bandes noted, "the amount of trash made it seem like a cleanup that would take days. But in just a couple of hours, our incredible volunteers completely turned the space around. It's amazing what can happen when a community comes together with heart and determination."

West Islip students have been getting in creeks with Save the Great South Bay's Creek Defenders, Ed Ragan and Andy Mirchel, for years.

Bandes is a longtime Advanced Placement Environmental Science teacher from a neighboring district. Bandes leaned into the school district's long-standing relationship with Save the Great South Bay when she took the reins of leading the department two years ago.

SGSB typically attracts anywhere from 10 to 20 and sometimes 30 volun-

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Courtesy photos

Village of Brightwaters considers changing term limits and compensation

Board of Trustees allow constituents to decide for themselves

BY GRACE MERCURIO

This year, Brightwaters residents will not only vote for Board of Trustees can-

didates during the June 17 Village Election; residents will also vote whether or not to compensate them.

Currently, the Mayor and Board of Trustees do not receive any compensation. The elected officials serve two-year terms and are limited to four consecutive two-year terms.

A public hearing was held on Monday,

May 5 at 7:30 p.m. for residents to discuss the possible inclusion of the following questions on the June ballot:

1) Should the Mayor and Board of Trustees' term length be extended from two years to four-year terms?

2) Should the term limits be adjusted from four consecutive two-year terms to three consecutive four-year terms?

3) Should compensation be provided to the Board Members (with proposed amounts of \$5,000 per year for the Mayor and \$2,500 per year for Trustees)?

Each of these questions will be considered individually. Therefore, term length can remain at two years, while the term limits can either be changed to 12 years

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teers at their clean-ups. This spring's Sampawam cleanup was a record breaker.

"We search estuary waters and the protected 100-foot adjacent property, identify pollution sources and vandalism, seek measures to remove blockages," West Islip Creek Defender Ragan explained. "We work with officials and legislators in the towns and county to arrange access and establish working relationships for common goals. They have been great working partners."

Ragan, Mirchel, and everyone at SGSB knows that water pollution doesn't start in the water. It starts on land.

"Our South Shore creeks and rivers provide essential freshwater input to GSB. Many of these creeks are naturally fairly slow moving due to the South Shore geography," Mirchel, explained. "By clearing trash and clogs, flow improves. Clean water starts where you stand!"

Ragan and Mirchel's West Islip cleanup is part of the core five, with leaders from four other towns—Babylon, Sayville, Bay Shore and Oakdale—stepping up since 2017 to be the change they want to see in the world by running creek cleanups in their communities.

Not all creek problems are as straightforward as debris removal. In fact, SGSB's insistence on getting in the water with West Islip students brought another serious problem to light.

Last March, after Ragan and Mirchel announced their intentions to get into another West Islip creek, Willet's Creek, the state notified the public that a Superfund site upstream continued to leak cadmium and chromium—cancer-causing heavy metals—into the creek.



Courtesy photos

When students and SGSB forced the issue last spring, Department of Environmental Conservation project manager James Kruegler noted that an asphalt cap was illegally removed by the owner of the former Dzus Fasteners property, Island Associates Inc., sometime before April 2021.

A review of the DEC's own data notes elevated levels of cadmium and chromium before construction on the site began, however.

Both SGSB and West Islip Schools have been awaiting four site improvement proposals before seeking community input to properly address the problem.

More information on that project is found at the DEC website: <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/site-cleanup/regional-remediation-project-information/region-1/environmental-cleanup-dzus-fastener-company> ■



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