

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

DAVID J. WILLMOTT SR., EDITOR



Suffolk County's Best Friend Lou Grasso

Louis Grasso, Suffolk Life's former managing editor for 16 years died on Tuesday, July 27. The people of Suffolk County lost one of their best friends.

Lou loved the common people. He rubbed shoulders and conversed with presidents, governors, senators, congressmen as well as state, county and local officials. He never walked away from these encounters with a swelled head. Yes, he knew them, spoke their language, asked them the hard questions and forced them to see different perceptions of different questions. Lou really relished speaking with every-day people, learning about their plight in life and seeing how Suffolk Life could help. Lou was fiercely independent. He took strong positions but was always ethically honest and demanded that all sides of the news be published.

Lou was a community man, he loved people and they loved him back. Before he came to Suffolk Life, he was president of the Sayville Rotary Club. He developed the annual pet parade that is still in existence to this day. He founded the Impossible Dream Promotion that raised money to send children with disabilities and wheelchair-bound children, to Disneyland. It was a huge success and brightened many sorrowful lives. One Christmas, a boy wrote to him to say what he wanted from Santa Claus was a dialysis machine for his father. The machine cost \$8,000. Lou raised \$12,000.

A day or a year did not go by when Lou did not reach out to help someone. As his wife, Suzee said, when someone asked for help he would just ask when and how and then make miracles happen. Thousands of lives have been touched by Lou's desire to serve others. Money was never his personal god. There was not a greedy bone in his body. What was there was love and compassion and a desire to be of service to his fellow man. Lou had the ability to see good in evil and, if given a chance, he would dispel the evil and bring out the good in those with whom he associated.

When Lou and I first met 20 years ago, he was an editor for the paid weeklies and I was the enemy. He spurned my attempts on several occasions to discuss employment but finally succumbed to my insistence to become our promotional director. Although he was fantastic at public relations, it was very apparent he had a love for the news product. An opportunity presented itself and Lou became the managing editor of Suffolk Life Newspapers.

For the next 16 years Lou devoted himself toward making Suffolk Life the best read newspaper in Suffolk County. He trained and motivated great staffs, he made sure they covered every detail of the residents' lives with vigor and enthusiasm. Lou, had a credo that he lived by; stories had to be accurate, fair, balanced and honest.

We were a perfect partnership. Lou was firm, but soft and gentle. I was tough and hard-nosed. I strengthened Lou and he mellowed me. Although I continued to write most of the editorials, Lou wrote his share, too. Few people could distinguish the difference as Lou and I thought and reasoned as one. He adopted my style and I adopted his.

Lou's challenge in life was to be a

teacher. He loved taking good, enthusiastic young people and teaching them the art of journalism; how to ask the right questions, how to ask hard questions, how to gain confidences and how not to make people love, but respect you. After basic training, Lou was a great motivator. He was free with his compliments. He praised accomplishments and kept the troops driving ahead to be the best they could possibly be.

We lost a lot of good reporters because we did not have deep pockets and could not pay them as well as some of the dailies and the government. This was the most frustrating aspect of Lou's job — seeing a person he had helped learn the business leaving for greener pastures. In all the exit interviews I conducted, never once did anyone who worked for Lou speak ill of him. In fact, they praised Lou and Suffolk Life for giving them the opportunity to grow into the journalists they never thought they had the ability to be.

Lou always remembered his roots. He was born the year before the nation entered the Great Depression. His family had a small scratch farm in Wyandanch, and he grew up with basic existence being the priority of the day. He loved to tell the story of his father, Rosario, whose passion was fishing. When he returned home from a day's outing, he would have not only a big mess of fish, but all kinds of prepared foods the family could not afford themselves.

The day finally came when Lou's father invited him to go fishing with him and divulged his secret. In preparation for the trip, Rosario had Lou take some Limburger cheese and put it in the rafters of the chicken coop. On the day of the fishing trip, Lou was sent to retrieve the cheese. At this point in the story, he would laugh and say, "Gosh, did that cheese stink." When Lou returned with the cheese, his father was preparing lunch, which consisted of two pieces of brown bread, garlic and cheese. Lou was disappointed because he was looking forward to real food.

Lou and his father went fishing on a head boat. Lou remembered the men smoking cigars and drinking beer in the cabin. The day was rough. About a half hour before they arrived at the fishing grounds, Lou's father announced it was time to eat. The other men took his cue. Lou's father carefully peeled each clove of garlic, allowing the aroma to fill the room. Then came the final moment when the cheese was unwrapped. As his father spread the concoction on the bread, the other fishermen bailed out of the cabin, leaving their lunch pails unconsumed. Rosario then said, "The smorgasbord is yours son, mangia!"

Lou had fished with me for several years. His quest in life was to catch a marlin. Although we had caught several marlin while he was on board, it was never Lou's turn in the chair. On one Friday afternoon in the office, I said to Lou, "Tomorrow's your day. You are not only going to catch a marlin, you are going to catch a big one." I won't repeat his reply.

The following day, I spotted a large fin in the water. As I swung the boat, the lure on the far outrigger excited the fish, and I told Lou to get in the chair. The fish struck and Lou had the fight of his life. The marlin turned out to be a 97-and-three-quarter-pound white marlin, one of the largest ever taken in New York State and one that still holds the record for the Shinnecock Marlin and Tuna Club. He had a smile on his face that would not go away.



Lou and Dave

Suzee, his wonderful wife and best friend, was there to witness the drama and the glory of the fight.

Lou was one of the founders of "The Group." A group of us had gone up to Roseland Ranch after the elections to rest and recuperate. We were sitting around talking about the good fortune and the successes we had. Each of us had a story that related to our past of an unusual moment of someone's generosity that had touched us.

Lou spoke of standing in front of a store looking at a train set he had always wanted. A stranger came up to him and, during a discussion with Lou, realized how much he wanted that train set, but there were no means to buy it. The stranger walked into the store, bought a train set, came out and gave it to Lou and wished him a Merry Christmas. The stranger then disappeared into the crowd. Lou never had a chance to thank him. This act of kindness left an indelible mark on the young boy.

That night, we all decided to pool our resources and try to reach out and help families for Christmas. The families we wanted to help were those normally able to provide for themselves, but, because of circumstances, Santa would not come that year. We raised about \$1,000 between us and did a family and a half. Everything was done anonymously. The recipients did not know who we were or where we came from.

Since the inception of "The Group," we have provided Christmas for close to 4,000 children. Lou and Suzee remained involved. Besides making an annual cash donation, the Grassos loved to be Santa for an entire family on their own, anonymously of course.

Lou was on top of almost every impor-

tant issue in Suffolk County. He was the spark behind the "Power for the People" campaign. This was the impetus in developing the opposition to the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant. Through his management of the reporters, his own skillful writing and editorials in Suffolk Life, we did the impossible: We stopped Shoreham from opening and spreading nuclear development in the United States.

We had many serious philosophical debates about what we were doing. We concurred that we preferred to err on the side of safety rather than on the side of greed. The fight cost both of us dearly in energy, time and money, but neither of us ever looked back with regret.

Lou relished and looked forward to interviewing political candidates seeking office. Each year, in September and October, we spent an average of 100 hours discussing, probing and questioning candidates. Lou was at his finest and he was a superb interviewer. Paul Harenberg once said the interviews were one of the toughest aspects of the campaign, but were handled evenhandedly and usually were enjoyable. We received a lot of insight that became part of Lou's institutional knowledge covering almost 40 years of local government.

Some people are born to take and some are born to give. Lou was a giver all of his life. Whether it was in the dog circles, his magnificent photographs, his skillful writing, or his teaching and motivating, he did everything out of love and conviction.

Lou was not only my partner in news but my advisor and friend. Lou was someone I knew I could always count on. He could be brutally honest but never vindictive. I trusted him explicitly as I hope he did me.

Right down to the end, Lou was 100% newsman. Suzee told me that on the night of his death he had been reading some budget reports from Brookhaven and smelled a rat and was going to write a story.

Lou's last day was the kind he cherished. He caught fish, laughed and joked with friends. Lou returned home to his warm and gracious wife who wanted to know about his day's activities. After a meal of fresh fish he had caught, he laid down to relax and passed away peacefully.

I was shocked and saddened when Suzee called. Angrily, I asked myself, "Why God, why such a fine man who was just beginning to look forward to his new life in retirement?" The answer came to me as I returned from helping Suzee make the funeral arrangements.

Lou had gone through a very scary bout with cancer. He was cured but still had that lingering fear of dying from this insidious disease. We had often spoken about death, and he said when his time was up, he wanted to go quickly. Lou had led a wonderful life of being a soldier of God, always reaching out to others.

Maybe the cancer was going to break out again and the editor and chief in the sky said, "Hey Lou, you have paid your dues and I need a managing editor up here; come home." And as an obedient servant, he obeyed.

Goodbye good friend.

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

DAVID J. WILLMOTT SR., EDITOR

Come to Our Birthday Party, August 12

We are celebrating our 38th birthday with a free Glenn Miller concert at CPI and you are invited.

In 1996, we hosted the Glenn Miller Orchestra and it was a stunning success. The Glenn Miller band was the leading group of the thirties. The sweet sounds this big band produced are still a universal favorite of the young and old.

The concert is free and everyone is welcome. Just bring the concert advertisement in *Suffolk Life* and hand it in at the bar, which opens at 8 p.m. The first show will be at 9 p.m. and the second at 11 p.m.

CPI is located on Montauk Highway, adjacent to the Shinnecock Canal, in Hampton Bays.

CPI has recently been put up for sale. Whether it remains as an entertainment establishment or converted

into a hotel remains to be seen.

Suffolk Life was first published on August 21, 1961. The premier newspaper was produced on my mother's kitchen table. The first edition was monthly, magazine size and had a circulation of 9,700. It covered the community of Riverhead. Today, Suffolk Life is delivered to almost 530,000 homes throughout Suffolk County, and is published in 35 localized editions, giving each community a voice.

We are looking forward to our 39th year and pray the good Lord will continue to bless us with a great staff, loyal readership and future growth.

This concert is our way of saying "thank you" for being such devoted and loyal readers. It is a great way for us to give back to the community.

And why not?

Same Old Rail Road

A few months back, we were stopped at a railroad crossing. The gates were down. We expected to see the same old vintage railroad stock roll past. Much to our surprise and delight, what came into sight were sparkling new, double-decker cars that were a sight for sore eyes.

At last, the railroad had modernized and come into its own.

This past week, we were stopped at the same gate. When the new double-decker cars rolled past, we remembered the saying, "Some things never change." Instead of being bright, clean and inviting, the cars were filthy, dirty and uninviting.

What is wrong with railroad officials that they cannot even figure out how to wash and keep clean their

rolling stock? Is the management that inept?

Don't give us the hogwash that the unions will not allow you to clean them. They may have their wasteful work rules, but the rank and file still take pride in their jobs. They are probably more sickened than we were to see these new cars deteriorate in just a few months.

We know MTA board members are basically political appointees, but regardless of who their political godfather may be, they do have a responsibility and should be held accountable.

Stop allowing the Long Island Rail Road to be the shame of Long Island. Reach out and get everyone involved to make it the pride of Long Island.

And why not?

Late and Twice The Rate of Inflation

New York State finally has a budget - four months and four days overdue. At \$73.3 billion, it raises spending over last year by 3.8%, exceeding this year's projected inflation rate of 2.4%.

Pataki had pledged to bring the budget in under the rate of inflation, but he obviously succumbed to the big spenders. This caused towns and school districts, as well as special agencies, to have to borrow on the outside market to fund the lateness of state aid.

This year, legislators shared the financial pain. As a result of a law the legislators passed last December, to increase their salaries, they agreed to have their paychecks suspended until

a budget was passed, if they had not do so by March 31.

It appears that just about every special interest got its wish with this budget. The only areas of cutbacks were in transportation where roads, bridges and construction took a hit.

Pataki can still use his line item veto on individual spending programs, but he has probably made a deal with the leadership of the Assembly and Senate not to exercise this power. Then again, he wants to run for president and he has to look conservative.

Pataki should have the courage to use his line item veto and bring the budget in line with inflation.

And why not?



What a Nice Airline

We flew Southwest for the first time this past weekend; what a nice experience.

Our contact started with a call to Southwest. We actually had a real, live person on the other end of the phone. We are used to being treated arrogantly and rudely by airline personnel, but the Southwest operator was friendly, courteous and, yes, helpful. She took the time to explain the various promotional fares and made suggestions on how we could get the best deal. We were ticketed electronically.

Upon arrival at the new, beautiful terminal at the Islip-MacArthur Airport, we noticed a sign conspicuously posted at Southwest informing us we did not have to wait in line if we had no luggage to check; and, if we had been preticketed, we could advance directly to the gate.

We made a mistake at that time. We were about an hour early so we decided to have breakfast before going to the gate.

Boarding numbers are given out at the gate on a first come, first serve basis. We should have obtained our numbers before having our breakfast. As it happened, we ended up with numbers 120 and 121 out of a possible 123, but the attendant was able to find two seats together. Again, she was pleasant and courteous.

Once seated, the attendant took our drink order, and, once in the air, quickly and efficiently delivered the beverages.

This system saves time, does not tie up the aisles and the flight was pleasant.

Returning from Washington, D.C., the same evening, the flight was delayed because of weather. A Southwest ticket agent informed us of the possible delay. Every few minutes, the agent gave us an accurate assessment of the situation. We cannot tell you the number of times that we have been in similar situations when, for some reason, the airline withheld this information from the passengers.

The flight on Southwest was probably one of the best we have ever had on a commercial airline. Our hat is off to Herb Kelleher, the founder and president of the airline. He is known to involve himself in every aspect of the operation and continually encourages his employees to remember the customer is the boss. He exemplifies leadership, and his passion for service can be seen throughout the entire operation. Southwest is a good example for other airlines to emulate; Kelleher is a fine role model for other chief executives.

On the ground, Islip Town Supervisor Pete McGowan, and his town board, have done a good job making the airport customer-friendly with the expanded facilities, modern baggage handling and additional parking lots, including the new shuttle bus service. They should be congratulated on the remodeling of the airport.

And why not?

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

DAVID J. WILLMOTT SR., EDITOR

Let The Truth Be Heard

LILCO got into trouble because it was not honest or forthright with its rate payers, the regulators or elected officials. Prior to the Shoreham nuclear plant fiasco, LILCO was like motherhood — no one wanted to voice anger against mom.

As questions developed on Shoreham, the management of LILCO stonewalled everyone, creating much more doubt about what it was doing. The scenario snowballed into a situation where even LILCO supporters began to question the company and its reluctance to communicate honestly with the public.

LIPA appears to be going down the same track. In trying to develop support for its takeover of LILCO, President Richard Kessel made numerous statements, promises and pledges to government officials, who took him at his word and now are hearing him deny he ever made them.

The Suffolk County Legislature wants answers, and it is calling for two public hear-

ings so the truth can be known. Our legislators are asking for subpoena power so they may force reluctant witnesses to come forth and, under oath, speak the truth. This truth should be told once and for all.

The Suffolk County Legislature is currently debating a bill to give it oversight powers over LIPA so the legislature can do its elected job of protecting Suffolk's consumers, including the rate payers.

The way LIPA is structured as an authority gives it monopolistic powers. The Public Service Commission, which regulates utilities in New York State, is not empowered to regulate an authority. There is no watchdog.

When LIPA was first conceived and created by the state legislature, the directors were to be elected by the rate payers of Long Island. They would have been Long Island

residents and been selected by their peers. Electing citizens as LIPA directors would have guaranteed that rate payers would have the ultimate say in how the authority would be run and who would do so.

Mario Cuomo, the governor at the time LIPA was created, demanded the right to appoint the original board before he would agree to sign the enabling legislation into law. Those appointments were to last only three years, which prevented the election of LIPA directors.

When George Pataki became governor, he had the legislation changed at the eleventh hour, giving the governor the power to appoint the directors, squashing any attempt to have LIPA directors elected by the rate payers.

Today, LIPA, as an authority, is a power

unto itself. It supersedes any oversight by any other agency or even the people who created it.

The Suffolk County Legislature is right to consider enacting a County Charter Amendment which would be voted on by the citizens of Suffolk County. Such an amendment would give the legislature and the county executive oversight responsibilities over LIPA. It is a dirty job, but somebody has to do it.

Let the legislature convene the public hearings. Give the legislature subpoena powers so that LIPA executives are forced to show up and to answer all the questions concerning the deal and its current operations.

Let the voters decide whether they want the county to have oversight over LIPA. The legislature must put this question on the ballot this November, and, at long last, allow the citizens of Suffolk County to have a direct say about LIPA.

And why not?

Frequent Ripoff

Airlines started frequent flyer programs as a promotion to encourage customers to use their services. They promised flyers they could accumulate miles that could be used for free trips. All you needed to do was accumulate 20,000 points or miles and you could fly to any destination you chose on that airline.

It was a common belief there were no limits on these miles. As people started to rack up miles, the airlines changed the rules. What had been 20,000 miles for a trip became 30,000, and the 50% increase caught consumers flat-footed. Then the airlines announced the miles had to be used within one year or they expired.

Now, the airlines have announced they are doing us a favor. If you make one trip within a year-and-a-half on their airline, the miles will not expire.

Frequent flyer promotions that once sounded good and caught the imagination of the American people have just become another ripoff.

The airlines have become arrogant and, at will, can change the rules or manipulate the programs in order to deny benefits to the consumer.

If this continues, elected officials and the public would be wise to consider a return to federally mandated consumer protection regulations.

And why not?

We Cannot Stop Nuts

Another tragic episode broke into the headlines this past week when an anti-Semite attacked a Jewish day care center on the West Coast. Several people were injured.

The police cannot be everywhere to defend the public. Not one person at the center was armed and therefore could offer no resistance to the mad man.

It seems it is becoming commonplace for someone deranged to take a gun, a knife or a bomb and attempt to do harm to peace-loving people. These demented brutes know their victims are sitting ducks, that no one is capable of subduing them or offering any kind of resistance.

Are we advocating that citizens should be armed? Yes we are.

A few years back, Florida gave its residents the right to carry concealed firearms. Anyone interested in carrying a concealed weapon had to be licensed and trained. They could only obtain a license if they had a clean record and had no history of mental illness. Assaults and crimes went down. Was it a coincidence, or did the perpetrators realize they would face a strong resistance?

Citizens who want to protect themselves should be allowed to take the training, learn how to safely handle a gun and be armed with the legal weapon of his or her choice. The police cannot be everywhere. They cannot stop random killing spree. They can only

get to the scene later to clean up the mess.

If citizens had the ability and the training to properly resist, lives could be saved. Not everyone would choose to be armed, but the perpetrators would not know who was and who was not.

We currently have community, state and federal firearm laws galore.

Unfortunately, they are not enforced. Part of the federal Brady Bill called for mandatory sentencing for the commission of a crime using a firearm. Just having a weapon required a mandatory sentence on top of the separate sentence for the crime. Using a gun and injuring someone required a mandatory life sentence. If someone were killed, the perpetrator was mandated to die. Although there have been thousands of crimes involving federal jurisdiction, few cases have been brought under the provisions of this law.

The feds say they do not have the staff to prosecute such criminals and leave it up to the states, who, in turn, apply less restrictive state standards.

Instead of running away from armed criminals, let us train our citizens to defend their rights. Let us use the laws that we have and encourage citizens to take whatever actions they deem necessary to protect themselves and their families.

And why not?



Better A Little Now, Than A Lot Later

The tuition at Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) is one of the best bargains around. Young people and adults can acquire a full semester of tuition for less than \$1,100. This compares favorably to most other schools that charge much more per semester.

Like everything else, the cost of operating the SCCC system has increased and the college's board of trustees has recommended a modest increase in tuition for the coming year. It is much better off increasing tuition slowly so the students can manage the increase, rather than being forced to hike tuition fees 20% to 30% in one fell

swoop. A large increase like this would force some students to drop out of school; and it could make a college education unattainable for others.

This is a political year and some legislators oppose an increase. They are playing politics, knowing full well that in the non-election years they would most likely hammer the students. We believe the trustees are right. Their plan for a modest tuition increase is proper. It is good management.

We have often said politicians should not try to micromanage the college. Those who persist in meddling where they do not belong should stop.

And why not?

WILLMOTTS & WHY NOTS

DAVID J. WILLMOTT SR., EDITOR

We Desperately Need Proper Campaign Reform

The whole campaign premise has gotten totally out of hand. Within my lifetime I remember people running for public office for altruistic reasons. They either felt they could make a contribution to better government or strongly believed in positions and wanted to make a difference.

Most governmental positions were part-time. On the town or county level you had to attend a couple of meetings a month, and, once in a while, a special hearing. Legislators went to Albany and completed a year's worth of work in two and a half to three months. Congress was a little slower and they did not get out until May or June. Most office holders served one or two terms and returned to private life.

As politicians increased their salaries and perks, they increased the amount of time they put in. The higher salaries and perks attracted more competition, which led to bigger campaign budgets and money for media specialists. This required even more expenditures of time for fund raising, a vicious cycle that has the dog chasing its own tail. A few years back, Senator Al D'Amato complained he had to spend more than 90% of his time in fund raising endeavors, saying, "What a foolish waste of time and energy."

Suffolk County has been fiddling around with campaign reform for some years. Last year, Legislator Steve Levy offered a resolution that resulted in a ballot question. Voters were asked to

approve campaign reform in Suffolk County. Candidates for office would be allowed to opt into a partially county-funded campaign program. Those who did so would have to meet certain restrictions and would be limited on how much they could spend. The funding would come from voluntary contributions made by landowners who would check off a box on their tax bill allowing an election fee to be added to their real estate taxes. Contributions would be voluntary and no taxes from the general fund would be used.

When Suffolk Life investigated the proposition, we came to the conclusion that participation would not be widespread and there probably would not be enough funds available to support the program. Since the voters were being given a choice whether to enact this initiative and contributions would be voluntarily, it could do no harm.

It took a year, but the legislature finally woke up to the fact that there probably would not be enough money in the fund. Now, it wants to come back to the voters to ask them to sign on one more time. This time, some legislators want to cloak the language to confuse the voters. They do not want to use verbiage that would indicate tax money from the general fund would be used to supplement the voluntary efforts. They want to use the verbiage that funds will be provided from the general fund, not bothering to mention it is comprised entirely of tax money.

Opponents say not all voters under-

stand it is tax money that funds the general fund and they want to make it crystal clear to the voters. Using tax funds is a totally different proposition from voluntary contributions. The campaign reform funding will become a voter tax to which everyone will be forced to contribute whether they want to or not.

The support for campaign reform will no longer be voluntary, it will be mandatory. Considering the fact that over half of those eligible to vote do not participate in elections, we wonder whether the question will have broad-based support or just be supported from a local minority interest.

If we wanted to be serious about campaign reform, we would follow the British system. Their campaigns are limit-

ed to weeks, not months. Restrictions are placed on how much money can be raised and how much money can be spent.

It is still possible to run a grass-roots election without spending hundreds of thousands of dollars. Just look at our government today. Are we getting a better qualified person than we did 40 years ago? We think not. The endless chase for money corrupts even those with the best intentions.

We applaud Suffolk County for moving ahead on the issue, but the legislature has to start fixing the fundamental problems with cloaking the truth. If the legislature is going to ask the voters to approve something, use simple, plain English.

And why not?



Lazio on Hold

Last week, Congressman Rick Lazio was about to announce his intention to run for the United States Senate. The media had been alerted and invited to a press conference.

Much to Lazio's dismay, Governor George Pataki threw his support behind New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani. It had been previously indicated to Lazio that Pataki would support Lazio. Minus the governor's support, Lazio put his campaign on hold. He did not pull himself out of the race, but he agreed to not actively solicit the nomination. He has left it up to Giuliani to formally announce he is running.

This is probably a good political

move. Lazio has been a rising star on the Republican side of the aisle. He has made it known for quite some time that his goal was to become a United States Senator from New York.

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan announced early he would not run this coming year. Giuliani cannot run again for mayor because of term limitations, and he set out to claim the Senate nomination for himself.

Giuliani's probable Democratic opponent is Washington, D.C., resident Hillary Rodham Clinton, formerly of Arkansas. The next 15 months are going to be very interesting.

And why not?

End Voice Mail Purgatory

Voice mail is considered almost a necessity today in business and government. It works, providing there is a safety valve, a live, human connection.

Systems that do not allow you to contact a real person are annoying and counterproductive. Most of Suffolk County's departments and agencies use voice mail, but do not have the capability to connect the caller with a live person. Legislator Steve Levy

finds this offensive and so does *Suffolk Life*.

Levy has sponsored a bill that will require all county departments and agencies to have their systems allow for human contact. This is another common sense approach to government by Levy.

The sooner the bill is enacted and executed, the better Suffolk County residents will be served.

And why not?

What Is the DEC Hiding?

MTBE is a gasoline additive that is supposed to reduce air pollution. It started to be put into gasoline in New York State three years ago, and is included in the gasoline from November through March.

Many have questioned whether it does any good, but all agree it increases the cost of gasoline. MTBE is suspected of being a cancer causing agent, particularly if it is spilled onto the ground. It is a fast-moving chemical that affects groundwater and air quality.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has compiled a comprehensive list of gasoline and oil spills that may have contaminated the soil and water with MTBE. It covers 1,500 sites statewide; more than 500 are on Long Island. The DEC has not

released it, so people who live near these sites cannot take precautionary actions.

Water officials, state politicians and environmentalists are up in arms at the DEC for hiding this information and are demanding answers. The DEC is an agency under Governor Pataki's control. As our governor, he should be demanding answers.

A disclosure of the sites would put the oil and insurance companies in a defensive position. Lawsuits will most assuredly follow once this information is revealed. Is Pataki doing the bidding of campaign contributors or is there a legitimate reason why this agency has not acted on its findings? We ask that a disclosure be made immediately.

And why not?