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Connor Middle Schooler Preston Whitfield weeds to make outdoor walks more enjoyable.

Q&A with Town Supervisor Whitney



Grand Island Town Supervisor John Whitney meets in his office with his assistant, Rhonda Diehl. Below, Whitney is pictured in front of the Project Olive application. (Photo by Michael J. Billoni)

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI
Contributor

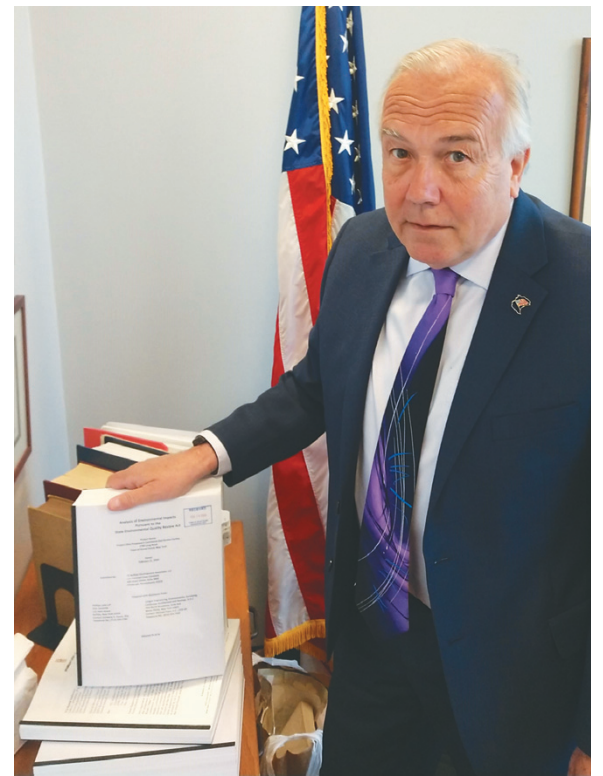
For most first-time elected officials, their first few months in office are often uneventful as most of the time is spent getting used to the new job. Uneventful is not a word John C. Whitney would use to describe his nearly five months as Grand Island town supervisor.

Six weeks after being sworn into his first elected position after a 31-year career in the town's engineering department, retiring in 2017 as town engineer, Whitney was attending his first Association of Town Officials meeting in New York City when his assistant, Rhonda Diehl, called with news that Fantasy Island was closing for good.

That was Feb. 18, and upon returning to the Island Whitney began working the phones in hopes of saving the park. Less than a week later the reality of rumors that began when he was

on the campaign trail last fall arrived at his office in the form of a 2,202-page application for a planned development district at 2780 Long Road. It was submitted by TC Buffalo Development LLC for a \$300 million project to construct an e-commerce storage and distribution facility for consumer products, using the code name, "Project Olive."

As Whitney and the Town Board began to tackle that massive project, which many believe is for e-commerce giant Amazon,



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Shining during darker times

Veronica Connor Middle School students in the DECA business club are staying connected in spirit during this time of distance learning and social distancing.

Mary Jane Fonte, Connor Middle School JV DECA advisor, said: "One of the many trials of distance learning has been staying connected as a JV DECA chapter, especially when all of our volunteer outlets and venues have been cancelled. Our students only needed to be reminded of their gifts and opportunities to share them, especially now, with the world around us! Early in our

social distancing, I compelled our eighth-graders to be an example of all of the positivity in the world that is still there despite what we are going through. Via email, I shared the following challenge with VCMS JV DECA: 'I love all of you and am grateful for the time we could spend together personally and virtually over this past year. Are you still trying to shine like a DECA diamond even though we are not at school? Here are some ways that I have thought of: perhaps you have an elderly neighbor that could use

SEE DECA continued on Page 6

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