

# Veterans services bolstered

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“One mistake can delay a claim for months,” said David Wohleban, a veterans service officer. “Our improved technology is helping us catch and eliminate any errors before documents are submitted.”

Ortt, a veteran who has provided \$185,000 in Joseph Dwyer grant money annually to the VSA to contract for counseling services for veterans, said he was impressed with entire atmosphere of the new VSA offices.

“Niagara County has done an incredible job in creating a professional environment where our veterans will feel welcome, appreciated and confident in getting the services they need and deserve,” Ortt said. “Accessing government services or programs can sometimes be a challenging or confusing process, but the employees at the Niagara County Veterans’ Service Agency have made it their mission to make this process as easy and efficient



From left: Adam Howard of the Veterans One-stop Center of WNY, Sen. Rob Ortt, Niagara County Clerk Joseph Jastrzemski and veterans service officer David Wohleban.

as possible, and I thank them for their efforts.”

Howard added, “I am tremendously impressed with this new setup and how it will positively

impact service to our veterans. I’m proud the Veterans One-stop Center was able to provide support to help make it happen.”

# Project additions contingent on sale proceeds from ‘Big Yellow House’

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Treasurer Stephanie Longwell informed the board that, as of May 17, the municipality had \$47,633.90 left in the playground account. With the rides, equipment and special rubber surface in place, and the splash pad installed, remaining invoices total \$42,050.

The playground, as originally presented, is actually under budget. Welch said that is largely thanks to donations of time and manpower from project developer Mark Cerrone Inc.

In evaluating the project, however, trustees lamented not adding an enclosure for additional safety.

“How did we miss the fence?” Trustee Dan Gibson said. “Every rendition I saw had a fence around it.”

Welch explained, “That was an add-on. It was not originally (included). That’s when we said ‘Well, we really should have a fence.’”

Moreover, Welch said the adjacent basketball courts need to be repaved, so as to make that area more user-friendly.

“If anybody’s looked at the basketball courts, you can see how badly it has deteriorated,” she said.

An estimate from Fox Fence to add a four-foot, black chain-link fence wrapping around the playground came in at \$12,970.53. Mark Cerrone provided an estimate for the basketball court resurfacing (\$75,375) and would install the asphalt. Here again, it’s expected the village would only be charged for parts, and not for labor.

These additions total \$88,345.53. The village would apply the remaining \$5,583.90 in playground funds to the fee.

Village counsel Joseph Leone said the sale of the “Big Yellow House” is nearing closure and should be completed by the end of next week. The municipality will receive more than \$270,000 for the house and land formerly used by the Lewiston Council on the Arts.

Trustee Claudia Marasco said, “We have to have a safety net under us.” She proposed the contin-



Construction continues at the inclusive playground at Marilyn Toohey Park, behind the Red Brick Municipal Building.

gency clause.

Recreation Director Brendan McDermott quoted Mark Cerrone in saying the basketball court paving and reconstruction would take about a month, once work gets underway.

In correspondence sent Friday to the Village Board, McDermott wrote, in part, “The courts have not been paved since 2001 and have last been resurfaced in 2011. The courts have reached the end of their lifecycle. In addition, the courts have sustained additional damage during the community build of the playground creating further liability to the village. The proposal from Mark Cerrone Inc. will ensure that park patrons and recreation program participants have a court that is safe for use.

“Having access to the all-inclusive playground along with resurfaced basketball courts will give our recreation leaders a venue in which to provide outstanding opportunities for all our participants to take advantage of. Parks and playgrounds bring people together, this park has the power to enhance opportunities for families across the region. The basketball courts are one of the most utilized Village of Lewiston parks and recreation assets. The Village Recreation Program is scheduled to host outdoor basketball clinics on the courts throughout the summer for youth ages 8-14 years of age. We currently have over 80 boys and girls registered for the program. In addition, we plan to host many Family Fun Night ac-

tivities throughout the summer in the park, which already have over 100 registered families. The courts are also used by many individuals for ‘pick-up’ basketball as well as exercise classes. These courts are used consistently throughout the day and year.

“Toohey Park is the ‘hub of play’ within the Village of Lewiston. The proposed work on the basketball courts will provide our community decades of safe and fun playing opportunities.”

The inclusive playground was estimated to cost \$750,000 when it was first proposed in 2018. Minus these additions, the total fell just shy of \$700,000.

Public playground donations from residents and service groups have exceeded \$127,000. Three years ago, the Town of Lewiston helped secure a \$200,000 grant from the Niagara River Greenway Commission. The village also was awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York. Longwell said the municipality has provided \$78,778.90.

Trustees pondered adding a second fence – this one 10-feet high – to encircle the basketball courts. They reconsidered after seeing an additional cost estimate of \$42,466.52.

Following the meeting, Welch said the playground would definitely open this summer, but she doesn’t have a timeline for the playground’s public debut – or know if it will be before or after the fence is installed.

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