



## Lantern festival historic event...

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Hauppauge girls' soccer players (from left) Crisalyn Abruscato, Meghan Bowden, Tammy Papadas and Taylor Mileti join the celebration after the Eagles' 6-0 win over Wyandanch Friday, October 14. The game was the school's Kicks for Cancer Fundraiser, held in honor of alum Courtney Tompkin, a former manager of the team who passed away from cancer in 2008, the 15th anniversary of the event. **See story, page 26.**

-Anthony Liferi photo



Town Supervisor Edward Wehrheim (left) and Gyrodyne President and CEO Gary Fitlin share a moment before the Celebrate Park ribbon cutting in St. James Tuesday. -David Ambro photo

## Seeking to save Gyrodyne land

By David Ambro

In a series of meetings over the past seven months, state and county officials, led by County Executive Steve Bellone and Assemblyman Steve Englebright (D-East Setauket), have advanced a plan with the Peconic Land Trust and the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to purchase the undeveloped portion of the Gyrodyne property in St. James using proceeds from the \$4.2 billion state environmental bond act on the November 8 ballot, **The Smithtown News** learned this week.

The Peconic Land Trust is a prominent conservation group founded by its president, John Halsey, which has successfully negotiated a number of high profile land preservation acquisitions on Long Island. After participating

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# Movement to buy Gyrodyne for public space

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in preliminary meetings about the Gyrodyne acquisition, the Peconic Land Trust agreed to undertake an appraisal of the Gyrodyne site for purposes of acquisition. The appraisal, a first step in the process to negotiate with Gyrodyne to purchase the St. James property, was recently completed and an offer is near, according to sources.

After the Smithtown Planning Board granted preliminary approval of the Gyrodyne subdivision in March, the St. James/Head of the Harbor Neighborhood Preservation Coalition, a group of local residents formed to fight the Gyrodyne industrial subdivision, filed a lawsuit against the town. Referring to the site in its historic name of the Flowerfield Fairgrounds, the Coalition earlier this year offered an alternative plan for the public acquisition of the site for outdoor recreational purposes. Head of the Harbor Mayor Douglas Dahlgard has also advocated for the public acquisition of the Gyrodyne property for preservation and recreational open space.

After the town granted preliminary approval to the subdivision, Gyrodyne released a statement April 1 announcing the approval, touting its significance, and outlining the path to final approval. In the statement, Gyrodyne left open the possibility of selling the property as a whole as an alternative to selling individual industrial development lots.

“Gyrodyne will continue to actively market its entire Flowerfield property on the basis of nine subdivided lots subject to and contingent upon final approval for the subdivision and related entitlements. Gyrodyne will also seek offers from potential buyers who may be willing to purchase the entire Flowerfield property or portions thereof on an ‘as is’ basis, as well as offers for the company as a whole, that Gyrodyne finds more attractive from a timing or value perspective,” the Gyrodyne April 1 statement says.

While the Coalition continues to raise money for its litigation, there has been a slow, steady movement on numerous levels of government for the acquisition of the Gyrodyne property, a concept the Coalition has been advocating for even before proffering its alternative open-space plan. Coalition spokesman Joseph Bolhofer was upbeat this week about the prospect of the public acquisition of the Gyrodyne property.

“In April and August, I met with County Executive Bellone, Assemblyman Englebright, State DEC representatives, the head of the Peconic Land Trust, and other county officials. The result of those meetings is that all parties are on board for the acquisition and preservation of the open space at Flowerfield. I am now confident that this will occur. We have turned the corner,” he said.

Mr. Bolhofer confirmed this week the Peconic Land Trust has completed its appraisal and he said Gyrodyne officials have made it clear they are amenable to selling the land for preservation. He also pointed out that of the \$4.2 billion bond act funding, \$650 million will be allocated for open



Lawn signs cropping up in St. James show support for the state Clean Water, Clean Air Bond Act and the fight to save the Gyrodyne property, also known as the Flowerfield Fairgrounds, from industrial development.

space acquisition and preservation.

“We have been told by government and other sources that the Flowerfield property is one of the obvious candidates for this purpose,” he said. “It has become clear, based on the strong financial and other assistance the Coalition has received, that there is broad support in the community for preservation of the Fairgrounds. If the money for the purchase does not materialize from private sources prior to the bond act money becoming available, I am confident, based on what I know, that it will be the source of funding.”

During an interview Tuesday, October 18, Assemblyman Englebright declined to comment directly about the acquisition of the Gyrodyne property, contending that anything he could say would only be speculative. He added, though, that it is of great importance for the environment and the critical work to preserve and protect Stony Brook Harbor that the environmental bond act be passed.

“It is my hope that the voters of the state approve the bond act because it will give us an important financial tool for critically important conservation initiatives of which the protection of the water chemistry of Stony Brook Harbor should be listed amongst such priorities,” Mr. Englebright said.

## Society to host Winter Lantern Festival

(Continued from page 2)

possible through the support of the Damianos Realty Group, which has offered its parking lot for the 10 week duration of the event, the Town of Smithtown, which has readied the grounds for the event, and Village of the Branch, which issued a permit for the lantern festival.

Kaleido Arts has been holding winter lantern festivals in New York City and Washington D.C. for several years and they have become popular. This year, Kaleido has added new locations in Staten Island, Nassau County and at the Smithtown Historical Society in

In the past, the Land Trust has acquired environmentally sensitive properties and held them in trust to give government agencies time to assemble funding for the public acquisition. According to sources close to the negotiations, Mr. Halsey is fully in support of taking the steps necessary for the public acquisition and preservation of 40-acres of open space at the Gyrodyne site.

The Town of Smithtown approved a subdivision of the 75-acre Gyrodyne property at the southeast corner of Route 25A and Mills Pond Road in St. James for industrial development of a 125-room hotel, 134,800-square-foot of medical office buildings, 25-rooms of senior assisted living, and an 80,000-gallon-per-day on-site sewage treatment plant.

Portions of the site are already developed with an industrial park and the Flowerfield catering facility. The remaining open space subject to the industrial development plan approved by the town is roughly the 40-acres that the Land Trust is seeking to acquire for preservation.

According to sources, Mr. Bellone and Mr. Englebright met April 1 with Mr. Halsey and others to discuss the importance of protecting Stony Brook Harbor. They looked at a map of the greenbelt from Stony Brook through

the Avalone Nature Preserve holdings and Gyrodyne up to Stony Brook University and agreed at that meeting that the acquisition of the Gyrodyne property is critical to preserve and protect the harbor and the greenbelt that impacts it.

Subsequent to that meeting, the Peconic Land Trust agreed to have the property appraised. Mr. Bellone and Mr. Englebright then agreed to work together to preserve the property and to try to obtain state funding from the environmental bond act if it is passed by the voters next month for the public acquisition of the land.

In the meantime, sources said that state DEC Real Property Supervisor Heather Amster met with Mr. Halsey, Mr. Bellone and Mr. Englebright and advised them that DEC fully supports preservation of the Gyrodyne property.

In 2020 the Town of Smithtown installed a \$3.9 million sewer main down Lake Avenue in St. James in anticipation of connecting it to a Gyrodyne sewage treatment plant. Public acquisition of the Gyrodyne property would alter the town’s plan, but there is an alternative solution being explored. Smithtown Supervisor Edward Wehrheim hinted this week that a plan to connect the Lake Avenue main is close at hand (see related story, page 13).

Suffolk County.

“Lantern festivals have been a part of Chinese culture and history for thousands of years, honoring our ancestors and celebrating peace, prosperity, and good fortune,” said Haokun Liu, Partner of Kaleido Arts & Entertainment Group. “We are thrilled to bring back the New York City Winter Lantern Festival now its fourth year, expand to new locations, introduce all visitors to the beauty of these artisan installations, and have the show become part of New York’s cultural holiday tradition.”

Each lantern festival venue features

a different theme, 10,000 lanterns in total. For more information, visit winterlanternfestival.com. The Society is offering sponsorship opportunities for the event which include ticket packages. For information, call the Society, 631-265-6768.

“Be ready for photo ops with friends and family, as this will be an unforgettable experience! Stunning light displays will guide attendees through our property, ending in a recreational area with food vendors,” Ms. Kapoor said, adding that the Society hopes to make the lantern festival an annual event.