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**Shawangunk
Mountain Guide**

Looking Ahead

Despite Disappointment, A Plan B Starts Taking Shape For The Area Now

By Shawangunk Journal Staff

WAWARSING – When local business and government leaders come together at the Ellenville village hall in the same government center where the Nevele has its offices next Monday, January 12, two big questions will be on everyone's minds. First, will there be room for everyone with opinions and two, what is the community thinking about its future these days?

Wawarsing town supervisor Leonard Distel and Ellenville Mayor Jeff Kaplan have let their thoughts be known in these pages, this week and last. The village and town's building code experts, who work intimately with planning issues, noted their disappointment this week, but also some glimmers of hope.

"Being overlooked for the casino license doesn't amount to the proverbial nail-in-the-coffin for Ellenville that everyone is afraid of... It's not a bad thing it was picked in Sullivan County. It's only 11 miles, 11.2 to be exact, and should benefit our area as well," said Ellenville building inspector and retiring Wawarsing planning board chairman Brian Schug. "I just hope that we could jointly come together as a town and village... consolidate services and look to our town and village leaders to see what plan B will be."

That should include development, he added, and not pushing away potential investors with a moratorium on large-scale development as has been heard around town.

"Elderly residents are the key to unlocking the booming healthcare industry's potential here. Elderly residents help to support area restaurants too when families take them out for lunch or dinner. Even local professionals would have more customers for estate and tax planning and for legal services if more seniors move to our area," noted Wawarsing Code Enforcement Officer Bryant Arms. "But without enough family friendly entertainment options, visiting families will have to endure kids moaning about how bored they are. It is going to be much more difficult to attract new seniors into the area if their families won't visit them here."


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Steve Kelley, president and CEO of Ellenville Regional Hospital — an entity that HAS seen growth in recent years — hopes that the level of cooperation and commitment that came forth for the casino can now be channeled to help develop other economic activity in the community.

"We have to do it for ourselves. We should be taking the lead on it," he said. "We can't wait around for someone else to do it for us."

Similarly, the dynamic Lynne Asha Gollither, behind so many of the Ellenville Library's and other community events, said she advocates "a holistic approach" that stresses the strengths of the area, from scenic beauty and agriculture to history and diversity. She also brought up the idea of getting the state and some other nonprofits to help create a Berme Road entrance to the expanding Minnewaska State Park.

Marcus Guiliano, of the Aroma Thyme Bistro destination restaurant in Ellenville, said he simply wants more business, more people.

"I'm working with two other guys to do a running festival in Ellenville. Some of the best cross country running in the country is right here in the Shawangunks," he said. "Outdoor magazine just put the Shawangunk Ridge Run on the bucket list of 21 things to do; the 80 mile Shawangunk Ridge Run is the king of endurance racing at the moment and it comes right through Ellenville. Lippman Park is a world class mountain biking trail, there's hang gliding; we ARE an outdoor destination playground and I want to see websites that promote our town and area for these strengths. Social media, too."

Guiliano also thought more restaurants, representing a variety of more diverse cuisines, could also help.

Outside of the immediate area, trail advocate Steve Rice, who sits on committees to expand and improve trails for the town of Rochester and Ulster County, released a statement envisioning a new prison and a new park that noted how, "Ulster County is one of the best locations for Correctional Facilities in New York State. With the budget windfall generated by the fines on Wall Street, we have an opportunity to re-balance our corrections assets to meet the anticipated prison needs of the future." He suggested re-purposing the Eastern Correctional Facility as a state park, moving the corrections portion to a leaner, greener facility on the state's Colony Farm property, and potential a corrections museum, a corrections department training facility and government offices.

"Some private uses might include storage facilities, indoor sport facilities and office space. It is a very big space and can support a number of uses simultaneously," he said. "A state park on the Eastern Correctional facility would give residents and tourists access to the Shawangunk ridge as well as

the O&W Rail Trail which is nearing completion. I also believe it will improve property values in the Port Ben area specifically and all of Naponoch generally."

Lynn Archer, Ulster County legislator for neighboring district 21, which includes Rochester and some of Wawarsing, thinks the old resort is already coming together as a trail hub.

"It's a perfect launching space for events having to do with the trails," she said, of the Nevele. "Biking, hiking, even horses... Even in its infancy, the trail system has provided tourism."

Manna Jo Greene, legislator in district 19, Marbletown and Rosendale, and a longtime regional environmental advocate talked about how "The Nevele had a very inclusive process" to reach out to various community stakeholders for support, and that's momentum she'd like to see used.

"Mayor Kaplan was citing positive things in Ellenville, there is some real leadership there. They could embrace a concept so fitting for Ulster County, real ecotourism, when people are looking for hope," she said. "Any place we can model that is a step in making that transition to a sustainable society rather than our present negative downward spiral."

Meanwhile, the Hudson Valley Resort's Elliot Spitzer (NOT New York's former governor) and Pine Grove's David O'Halloran are saying they'd like to revitalize and expand the idea of video lottery terminals to include the Nevele and Honor's Haven Resort.

"It would allow us to turn these resorts into something the customer today is accustomed to," Spitzer said. "You need to compete in today's market, and all these resorts need serious renovation. VLTs would allow us to make a sustainable investment into these properties and turn them into four star resorts."

"Michael Treanor deserves our appreciation for successfully communicating to Ulster County and New York State the economic challenges that have been facing Ellenville," O'Halloran added. "Those efforts should not die with the decision of the casino commission to locate a casino in Sullivan County; we need a Plan B. We propose to request legislation to provide Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs) in Rochester and Wawarsing that would encourage renovation investments in four local resorts and create a community economic development plan using Reward Cards... Guests using VLTs would earn Reward Dollars valid in Ulster County shops, farms, restaurants and service."

Finally, Gerry Benjamin of the SUNY New Paltz-based Center for Research, Regional Education, and Outreach (CRREO) said the lack of an interstate connection doomed the Nevele bid, along with its location, but the real

saving grace for the entire region remains agriculture.

"I don't like tourism so much, because it's fundamentally discretionary — depends on income and discretionary spending," the former legislator and SUNY New Paltz dean said. "Agriculture holds the greatest hope, especially in its niche forms... there are opportunities for some direct marketing to New York City."

Former village manager Mary Sheeley, meanwhile, said that thought should be given to turning the Nevele site into a state park complete with skiing and golf amenities. And the greater community should finally get beyond its dreams of seeing manufacturers return... Ellenville is too far from main routes for that.

"We have to be proud of where we come from — no one is keeping you here, so if you want to go, go," she said, noting the need for community forums in which all ideas can come to the table. "If you want to stay, hold your head up and be proud to live here."

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