

Schalmont News

CENTRAL SCHOOLS

Schalmont Chooses Homestead

Tax rates for all five towns in Schalmont Central School District will reflect school board members' recent decision to enact the homestead tax option during the 2007-08 school year. The Schalmont Board of Education was tasked with making this decision after the Rotterdam Town Board passed a law in February allowing the town and area school districts to use homestead.

In making their decision, board members took into account both the impact of the homestead option on all Schalmont taxpayers and the support for it voiced by many district residents.

Board President Michael DellaVilla said, "We know the importance of commercial properties in our success as a community, but we also understand the impact a single tax rate could have on our homestead parcels next year."

The homestead tax option allows for the creation of a dual tax rate for homeowners (residential property owners) and non-residential property owners, with property designations determined by a town's assessor. Choosing to enact this option means the school tax rate for residential property owners (homestead) will be less than the school tax rate for all other property

owners (non-homestead).

Though this option affects school tax rates, it *does not* affect the amount of money that the district collects (i.e. school tax levy). Similarly, property reassessments in Rotterdam also *do not* affect the school tax levy. But homestead and property reassessments *do* have an impact on how the school tax levy is spread among taxpayers in the district.

According to Superintendent Valerie Kelsey, "The board is very sympathetic to the anxiety many taxpayers are feeling in

light of Rotterdam's town-wide property reassessment. We hope this decision will lessen homeowners' burden and still fairly distribute the school tax levy."

Even though board members were required by New York State to decide whether or not to implement a dual tax rate by April 1, the district will not be able to determine exact school tax rates

until pertinent information from the state is received this summer.

"Every effort will be made to be responsible in determining tax rates, while still maintaining the quality of education that children in this community deserve," said Kelsey.



Young Scientists: Wildlife biologist George Steele (left) has shared his knowledge of the life cycle of chickens with students at Jefferson Elementary for several years. First-grade students in Bonnie Barner's class recently learned how to tell if a chick is developing inside an egg without cracking it by using shadows. Their new knowledge led students to proudly proclaim, "We're ornithologists!"

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Fifth-graders create their own watery world

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■ Budget Forecast Minimize Tax Increase, Maximize Academic Success

When taxpayers help fund a quality education for all students, they make an investment in their community's future. That's why Schalmont administrators, budget committee members and the school board are making every effort to create a school budget that is both fiscally responsible and focused on students' academic success.

This year, district residents are facing several financial challenges: local issues such as property reassessments and the homestead tax option, and national issues such as increasing fuel and energy prices. Understanding these issues is an important part of creating a fiscally responsible budget, according to Michael DellaVilla, president of the Schalmont Board of Education.

He said, "We want to offer the best education possible and

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District Aims to Minimize Tax Increase, Maximize Academic Success

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meet our board goals, while still considering the economic issues we're all facing."

Board members are working hard to present a school budget that addresses taxpayers' concerns and still meets students' needs. Still in the draft stage, the 2007-08 school budget will not be formally adopted until the second budget forum on April 16. Currently, it proposes a tentative increase in the school tax levy of 4.5 percent (see chart at right).

"We've shown a consistent reduction in our school tax levy over the last four years, and still increased programs for our children," said DellaVilla.

Some of those programs include accelerated math and science classes, a forensics elective, and Project Lead the Way pre-engineering classes. High school students also can expand their educational horizons with distance learning classes in psychol-

ogy, French, computer science (AP Java), and theater arts. The 2007-08 draft budget supports the continuation and enhancement of such programs.

According to Superintendent Valerie Kelsey, "The final budget put before voters will be as close to the state's contingency cap as possible without making cuts to existing programs."

District residents can hear more details about the proposed budget at the board meeting and final budget forum on Monday, April 16, at 7 p.m. in the Schalmont Middle School LGI Room, 2 Sabre Dr.

Residents unable to attend are invited to share their thoughts on the budget by e-mailing superintendent@sabrenet.net. Budget information also will be posted at www.schalmont.org and presented in greater detail in the next issue of this

School Tax Levy History



district newsletter.

The official vote on next year's school budget will take place on Tuesday, May 15, from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the high school.

An Ocean Adventure, Together

Special ed. students explore ocean life with fellow fifth-graders

There's a hallway in Jefferson Elementary where you can practically hear the ocean waves. Pause a moment, and you'll find yourself surrounded by sea creatures.

Penguins swim in search of fish. A dolphin leaps out of deep, blue water. A shark lurks in the seaweed.

This is the world created by students in Carrie Fiske's fifth-grade class. Along with special education teacher Lori Bittner (pictured at right), Fiske created an ocean project that allows her students and their special education peers to partner in developing language and reading comprehension skills.

According to Bittner, "We wanted to modify the curriculum so that all children could learn at a certain level."

The end result was a project that required each student to research an ocean creature and take notes on what he or she discovered. Those notes were then cut into strips, and students categorized their creatures based on habitat,

classification, movement, diet, and behavior.

"This helped develop a lot of language skills," said Bittner. "For instance, a student's note might say, 'A shark moves very slowly through the water.' Students had to really think about the words when we asked them to put their notes in a category."

Those notes were bound in a booklet, and students used the information to create drawings and papier-mâché models of their

ocean creatures. Fiske said, "Our goal was to make a hands-on activity that presented academic information in a fun way. It was wonderful for kids to actually see their note-taking evolve into a creature."

Throughout the project, special education students had the same positive learning experience as their peers.

"This type of activity builds their self-esteem and confidence as well as reading and writing skills," said Bittner. "Research skills are often difficult for special education students. This was a way of organizing the information for everyone."





Would you like to serve on the Schalmont Board of Education?

Information packets for those interested in running for the Schalmont Board of Education are now available on weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. in the district office, 401 Duaneburg Rd.

Three positions will be up for election on May 15. Each position is for a full three-year term beginning July 1, 2007, and ending June 30, 2010.

The incumbents for these positions are Sandra Beloncik, Michael DellaVilla and Robert Sheehan.

Candidates must be a district resident for at least one year prior to running. They also must complete the petition enclosed in the information packet and file it with the district office no later than Monday, April 16, by 5 p.m.

Visit www.schalmont.org for more information on the board and its members.

■ A snapshot in time...

SCHALMONT MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE EARLY YEARS

Today, hundreds of young students continue to develop their academic skills at Schalmont Middle School. That was not the case in the late 1950s because the school didn't exist until 13 years after the initial vote for consolidation.

Creating a Middle School

The population growth that led to the creation of Schalmont Central School District did not end with the initial consolidation in 1955. As the years passed, more and more students joined the district.

Debate began about how to handle this growth, and for some, there were international threats to consider. Cold War tensions prompted one school board member to support the expansion of facilities in order to prevent students from falling behind those in the Soviet Union.

By 1962, Schalmont Junior-Senior High School was overcrowded with 865 students, and enrollment was predicted to increase by 300 within three years. This led to a board proposal for a separate, 18-

20-room junior high school for \$890,000, but voters rejected it in October 1962.

A few months later, that proposal was followed by one for just an expansion to the existing high school at a cost of \$716,000. An independent citizens' committee solicited voter input, but this second proposal was still rejected.

In 1966, a proposal for a new middle school was presented to voters after 18 months of



study and planning by more than 150 district residents. The \$1,950,000 building would house 750 students in grades six through eight.

This last proposal finally met with voter approval. The building was officially named Schalmont Middle School in February 1968, and the first students walked its halls that September.

The Start of Team Teaching

Schalmont Middle School was unique to the Schenectady area at the time because of the grades it housed.

The school's first principal, Joseph M. Macali, said it would "combine the elementary school's concern for the whole child with the secondary school's concern for academic achievement."

Sixth-graders were instructed on the second floor and for the first time left their home classes to attend special classes, such as art and music. Boys also received weekly classes in industrial arts, and girls attended homemaking.

Seventh-graders were taught using a team teaching approach, which involved breaking them up into eight sections. Each section was instructed by English, social studies, math, and science teachers as well as special subject instructors. This format was designed to eliminate duplication by teachers in

the preparation and presentation of lessons and to help them have a more comprehensive understanding of their students.

Eighth-graders were instructed by teachers in the departmentalized format more typical of high school.

This setup remained unchanged for several years, but the team concept was eventually expanded to all three grades.



Please help us celebrate our Golden Anniversary by joining us for:

- Schalmont Central School District's **50th Anniversary Rededication Ceremony** on **Tuesday, April 24**, at 7 p.m. in the high school's new gym;
- The induction of the first Schalmont High School Alumni Wall of Distinction honorees at the rededication;

- Mariaville Elementary School's **80th Anniversary Celebration** on **Wednesday, April 25**, at 7 p.m.;

- Time capsule dedications and special "open house" activities at all schools throughout the week;

- Tours of the district, and more!

Visit www.schalmont.org for more details.



In Schalmont, It's Never Too Late to Go Back to School

Young students aren't the only ones who benefit from quality local schools. This spring, 312 participants in the Schalmont Adult Education Program are making the most of their school district, too. In 24 different classes, they're becoming healthier, developing as artists, learning about new technologies and much more.

According to secretary Donna Notar, who registered the adult students, "People are calling to say they love their classes and tell me how great their instructors are."

In her work, she has found that health and fitness offerings are particularly popular. One example is the PiYo class, a

combination of Pilates and yoga, which has over 40 participants. Rotterdam resident Kerry Frank is a first-time student in the class.

She said, "It's great that the school facilities are open to the public. I love the convenience of the location, and that you can go out, have fun with a group of parents, and have time for yourself as an adult."

Technology classes are another popular offering, particularly among senior citizens. Director of Curriculum Susan Cook said, "There's a high level of interest in technology and how our world is changing. People need and want to keep up to date."

The Adult Education Program provides diverse learning experiences at a very minimal cost to participants, and several courses are offered free to senior citizens. The costs associated with class instructors are built into registration fees, so the program is also self-supporting.

"This allows us to more fully engage district residents in their local schools," said Cook.



"Efforts like this help us better meet the needs of our community as a whole, and not just those of residents with school-aged children."

Rotterdam resident Marcia Ellis is certainly engaged as a participant in the fancy hors d'oeuvres and desserts class. "It's winter, and this is a fun thing to do on a Tuesday night. The accommodations are wonderful, and I think most of the people in my class would like to do it again," said Ellis.

With its growing popularity, Adult Education Program offerings are sure to grow in the future. Visit www.schalmont.org/District/adultedhome.htm to find out which spring classes have not yet started.



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