



Save the Pine Bush

April/May Newsletter

Apr/May No. 145 • 33 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12210 • email pinebush@mac.com • phone 518-462-0891 • web www.savethepinebush.org • Circ. 625

Vegetarian/Vegan Lasagna Dinner

Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 6:00 p.m.

Earth Day Event

Lou Ismay, George Keleshian,
George Courtney and Steve Coyle

will speak about

Revolution for the Environment — Past and Future

The April dinner will open with a celebration of Lou Ismay for his work with PYE - Protect Your Environment Club at SUNY Albany. This is the 50th anniversary of the PYE Club and Lou Ismay's Environmental Forum. Many of the founders of Save the Pine Bush met through PYE and projects they did while attending the Environmental Forum. George Keleshian, PYE president in 1973 and owner of One Energy/Zeroenergy Bldg. Inc., will speak about the history and projects of PYE, including litigation. Looking to the future, our speakers, George E. Courtney III, a Senior Environmental Consultant, and Steve Coyle, owner of Town Green, an international urban planning consultant group and co-founder of the National Charrette Institute, will speak about the future for the environment including importance of resilient communities, clean water, flood control, urban planning and energy.

At the Westminster Presbyterian Church, 85 Chestnut Street (people with cars can park in the lot near the door). All-you-can-eat lasagna dinner, with vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options, salad, garlic bread and delicious desserts. Only \$12 for adults, \$6 for students, and \$2 for children. People who make reservations are served first. For reservations, please leave a message for Rezsins Adams at 462-0891 or email pinebush@mac.com.

Interested people are welcome to attend the program beginning at 7:00 for no charge.

Spring Hike or Ski With Claire Nolan Saturday, April 27, 2019 at 9:30 AM

Meet at: Pine Bush Discovery Center parking lot, east side of Route 155, opposite Old State Road.

For GPS - 195 New Karner Road, Albany NY 12205

Leader: Claire Nolan • For More Information: (518) 209-6477

Hike or ski depending on the weather (April! It could snow!). Our experienced, ever cheerful leader, Claire Nolan, will lead you through a wonderland of sand dunes and pines. Please dress for the weather and take precautions for ticks.

The hike is free and open to the public. Bring your friends!

Keith Schue and Ward Stone fire up "Save the Pine Bush" about the Proposed Gas Turbines and the ongoing toxin issues at Sheridan Hollow

by Hugh Johnson

ALBANY, NY: At our February Save the Pine Bush dinner, two speakers, Keith Schue and Ward Stone, spoke about how toxic pollutants continue to impact the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood in Albany and how it might get even worse.

Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York Power Authority (NYPA) had planned to install a new Gas Power Plant in Downtown Albany at the old Sheridan plant, built in 1911, and still operates with steam from electricity derived from fracked gas shipped from nearby states.

Keith Schue lead the first talk discussing how not only is the governor and NYPA's proposal a bad idea for downtown Albany, but how

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The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster: Public Betrayal, Justice Denied

by Tom Ellis

ALBANY, NY: "This book is about regulatory capture by a large corporate interest," said Bruce Campbell. He discussed the 2013 runaway train explosion in the Quebec town of the Lac-Mégantic at the March 20 SPB dinner. Mr. Campbell is the author of *The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster: Public Betrayal, Justice Denied*, published last year. He was joined by former Albany Common Councilman Dominick Calsolaro, who led the struggle against the "bomb trains" in Albany earlier this decade.

Mr. Campbell brought greetings from his friends in Lac-Mégantic. He is a political economist, an adjunct at York University, and former director of the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, a think tank. He said his grandfather was a railway conductor and an uncle a railroad brakeman.

He "watched in horror" the Lac-Mégantic
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Schue and Stone continued from page 1

geothermal energy would be much better, cleaner and very renewable.

The residents living near Sheridan Hollow have been exposed to coal and oil since the plant was built. Then from 1981 to 1994, to add insult to injury, they were also exposed to horrible toxins from ANSWERS, which was a garbage incinerator plant. This old incinerator is where the two large turbines would be constructed, constantly working to produce gas to the Empire Plaza, about a half mile away. Carcinogens released from fracking include nitrogen oxide, benzene, formaldehyde, and methane. Nitrogen oxide reacts with sunshine to produce ozone. Methane traps heat even better than carbon dioxide, which of course means it will add to global warming and climate change. Methane is toxic to humans. If this isn't bad enough, the noise from the turbines will produce noise pollution 24/7 too.

If the station is built and uses fracked gas, the Empire Plaza would rely 90 percent on fossil fuels for electricity, and 100 percent for heating. Also, the current backup system requires additional fossil fuels running ALL the time which add additional pollutants to the air.

Keith talked about another MUCH more renewable idea. Adding solar power paneling and wind turbines would help with the electricity and backup and, of course, are clean. However this solar and wind would not be enough to produce all the electricity, heating and cooling to run the Empire Plaza. He argued the best way to produce most of the energy would be with geothermal power, which would drive both the heating and cooling systems of the Empire State Plaza. The system does NOT use fossil heat or resistant heating and is more than 300 percent efficient since heating or cooling can be transferred without ANY additional energy. The Hudson River could provide ALL the water that is needed to pump heat and cooling through a capillary pumped loop (CPL). The latest technology of geothermal includes thermal load sharing. This process makes geothermal heat and cooling, completely renewable with no additional energy to move hot or cold water for heating. This technology was first introduced at Stamford University and is being utilized at the state capital buildings in Denver and Oklahoma City. It also being used at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs.

Keith felt there is NO reason why it could not be done at the Empire Plaza. A "backup" system would be required for those times when the system for some reason did not work. A fossil fuel system could be available for a long term failure (which would be extremely unlikely),

but for more frequent short term failures (like weather issues), backup batteries driven by solar and wind power should work fine for the Empire Plaza. The long term backup would not be running unless needed.

A letter was sent to Governor Cuomo last May from the Sheridan Alliance for Renewable Energy that Keith is a part of. This letter stated that adding the two turbines would be a bad idea and the geothermal and thermal load sharing heat-exchange would be preferable. The letter and many discussions with NYPA apparently resulted in the Governor not making a hasty decision to go with additional gas fired turbines. The New York Power Authority has conducted additional studies to see which would be the best way to heat and cool the Plaza and put out bids looking at the best design.

Keith concluded that there is hope that NYPA and Cuomo, who already approve of increasing solar and wind power as backup energy, could select geothermal energy as the main option to power the Empire Plaza.

Ward Stone, the retired long time wildlife pathologist for the state of New York (for over 45 years), spoke next. Recovering from health issues he was as passionate as ever. This was not his first talk for Save the Pine Bush. Despite being retired, he continues to fight against pollution, particularly lead that is found in many unexpected places, especially around Sheridan Hollow. Ward had talked to the former Albany mayor Corning about this problem. Ward was so persistent that his boss threaten to not only not promote him, but demote his position. Ward did not flinch, he continued to fight pollution.

He told a story about a time back around 1980, when he visited the ANSWERS station to find how much toxins the plant emitted. He went in the evening after work, knocked at the door and nobody answered. He helped himself inside the plant and tested the plant for lead and various other toxins. He found it in MANY places, much more than he imagined on all kind of surfaces. The white paint buildings surrounding the plant had turned black. He found lead where kids played basketball and took into their homes via their shoes. The pollution was so bad, it made the snow in Lincoln park turn black! Lead was even found in the soil and the plumbing.

Ward admitted he was often frustrated spending much time writing to and fighting with governors and commissioners than cleaning the environment.

He indicated scientific research has found not only does lead poisoning causes permanent brain damage to children but can lead to extremely aggressive behavior. Studies in Baltimore

reveal the same idea. Lead might lead to violent crimes!

Ward bought cheap jewelry with his daughter (which was made in this area), and alas found lead in the jewelry that many children wear. The lead makes the jewelry very mailable and easy to sell even though it does not hold up well. The jewelers were making MONEY on it! They would extract metal from ballasts of car wheels for a low price which contain LEAD! He also pushed the idea of continuous testing for lead paint which remains in many buildings even though it has been banned for over 40 years. Young children like to eat lead paint since it tastes sweet like candy.

People are still dying from LEAD even though it has been outlawed in new construction for over 40 years. This is UNACCEPTABLE!

Ward has pushed the idea of having kids or even adults who committed violent crimes tested for lead, which is known to cause significant brain damage. He has set up for people to call him for tests via an X-ray machine.

In addition to lead, dioxin tetrodotoxin and of course methane were emitted from this plant and still are found everywhere and all are potentially lethal to humans.

Ward and others had to take their opponents to court. Ward said contacting the governor was not enough to shut the ANSWERS plant nor is it sufficient to battle the ongoing toxin problems in Sheridan Hollow. His opinion is that neither DEC nor the Health Department are doing enough to test this area and clean up the toxins around Sheridan Hollow.

Ward continues to fight to have the city clean up the toxins, namely lead. Soil, and other surfaces everywhere in every city need to be rechecked, then cleaned up to protect our youth. We need to fight this since our current president has reversed water and air quality regulations. We need to hold the slum lords and other owners responsible for this lead, and they need to clean it up. He said we should use "science" NOT politics to get the job done and vows to do MORE to clean the environment of lead for his next 80 years!

We as members of the "Save the Pine Bush" need to speak up to representatives, DEC and the Department of Health, stating NO FRACKING in New York and CLEAN up the toxic mess that still exists to this day in Sheridan Hollow.

WWW.
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Lac-Mégantic continued from page 1

disaster on television that killed 47 residents. He immediately noticed that everyone responsible blamed others. Shortly thereafter he began writing about the inferno. Soon he learned a colleague had lost three family members at Lac-Mégantic.

The Lac-Mégantic disaster “is a story of corporate criminality...the result of the systematic removal of vital safety regulations over decades . . . it became not a question of if but when and where.”

The fatal train came from the North Dakota shale oil fields, passed through Chicago, and arrived in Montreal with 72 oil filled cars.

He strongly criticized the work of Hunter Harrison, who implemented “precision railroading,” retired from Canadian National (CN) in 2009, and joined Canadian Pacific (CP) a few years later; and Ed Burkhardt, CEO of the Montreal, Maine, and Atlantic (MMA), a rail company that was hauling the oil to a New Brunswick refinery. MMA he said had a “terrible safety record,” did not fixing violations, and operated lengthy oil trains with single-person crews.

Tom Harding was the locomotive engineer on the train; he thought there should be a second person aboard. On the fatal trip, he saw malfunctions with the lead locomotive and tracks in poor condition. He parked the train at the top of a hill on the main track because an adjacent siding was not available, reported the engine problems, and went to a nearby hotel for the night. A locomotive fire soon started, firefighters arrived and put it out, but, in doing so, disabled the brakes.

Lac-Mégantic has 6000 residents. Many had been out that evening enjoying the hot summer weather. The train started to roll down the hill at about 1:00 a.m., derailed fifteen minutes later at 60 mph, crashed, spilled six-million liters of oil, and exploded, incinerating much of the downtown. “The historic town center is no more,” said Mr. Campbell. Nearby buildings not destroyed in the blaze were soon demolished, supposedly due to contamination. “It became a cascading tragedy,” he said, when ambulance chasers arrived and deceived many of the survivors.

He said deregulation and self-regulation became increasingly common in Canada after 1988. In 2006, Canada Prime Minister Steven Harper began a decade of paralyzing regulators. An exponential increase in oil train transport coincided with the deregulation mania. Single person trains first appeared in 2012.

Among the post-disaster improvements are that Canada banned single-person rail crews, rail car designs were strengthened, and insurance requirements enhanced, but “no decision maker in the Lac-Mégantic tragedy has been held ac-

countable,” nor has there been any independent review of the crash.

Major safety risks remain today, he said. These include still inadequate rail car strength, inspections, and public access to information; oil volatility, the length and weight of trains, and company self-regulation. At present, oil by rail is at record levels, much Canadian oil is exported, with an increasing number of runaway trains.

He concluded with a quote from Susan Dodd, author of *The Ocean Ranger*, who wrote: “Time and time again, public’s trust governments to ensure the companies operate prudently. Time and time again, we are shocked by a new disaster caused by corporate negligence. We say we will never forget. Then we forget. And then it happens again.”

During the discussion, Mr. Campbell said Maine allows one-person crews and four rail workers died in the USA in the past month. Dan Van Riper said “Albany could have been Lac-Mégantic for five years...the real criminals are those who turn these trains into bombs” Mr. Campbell agreed saying the volatile materials should be removed prior to transport.

Retired Selkirk rail worker Jon Flanders spoke. He said rail workers in the US are always tired and they work at all hours. He visited Cuba several times. Cuba has five-person rail crews, they work 15 days on, then 15 off, thus having normal lives. Communities receive advance notice if hazardous materials are to pass through. No one, he said, is notified if nuclear waste or chemicals pass through Selkirk. “Another world is possible,” said Jon.

Mr. Campbell said that during the first three months after the Lac-Mégantic crash, Canadian rail owners, at first scared true regulations might be imposed, lobbied heavily and successfully “to block, dilute, and delay serious regulation.”

Lou Ismay said he has made a list of US industries that have together caused millions of deaths and injuries with no executives imprisoned. He asked, “Can we have free enterprise and no responsibility? We must speak up if we want changes.”

Dominick Calsolaro urged us to read Mr. Campbell’s book and said corporations regulate themselves in the United States. Today, he said, we have ethanol trains coming through Albany but they “do not seem to be on any one’s radar... We are probably getting as many ethanol trains today as oil trains six years ago.” He asked when was the last time we saw a news release about inspections of local tacks or trains. Rail companies, he said, oppose regulations and inspections. “We need to keep this in people’s minds.”

Victories are possible he said, citing how, when many municipalities enacted anti-fracking

laws, Governor Cuomo came around and banned fracking in New York. Local governments, he said, should pass laws even if they can’t enforce them, hopefully putting pressure on the national government. He said Hudson Riverkeeper created a video a few years back showing crumbling rail bridges that cross the Hudson River. “DEC [the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.] is understaffed,” he said.

Andy Arthur said the Dunn Memorial Bridge [that connects Albany and Rensselaer] passes over railroad tracks. The bridge has sharp curves on both ends. Gasoline transport trucks traverse the bridge. “A fire on the bridge could be devastating,” he said.

Betty Head concluded the discussion saying the national disaster we should be paying attention to is the big corporations donating money to politicians.

Bruce Campbell Gets the Tour

by Susan Dubois

As described in Tom Ellis’s article in this newsletter, the speakers at Save the Pine Bush’s March 20, 2019 dinner were Bruce Campbell, the author of “The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster: Public Betrayal, Justice Denied” and former Albany Common Council Member Dominick Calsolaro. Because Bruce was traveling from Ottawa, Ontario for the event, Susan DuBois and Lynne Jackson decided to see what other opportunities for meetings and interviews could be arranged for Bruce while he was in Albany, to heighten awareness of the problems outlined in the book. Fritz Edler, a representative of Railroad Workers United who lives in Washington, D.C., was also in town at the same time; he and Bruce have participated in book tour events together in other cities. Railroad Workers United is an inter-union caucus of railroad workers across North America.

Bruce was interviewed prior to his trip by Mark Dunlea of WOO. Bruce and Dominick were interviewed on March 20 by Dave Lucas of WAMC, for the Midday Magazine program. The Capitol Pressroom radio program, produced by WCNY and broadcast locally on WVCR, will probably do an interview by phone with Bruce after he returns to Canada.

On March 21, Bruce, Lynne and Susan went to a meeting of the Health and Environmental Justice Group of the South End Community Collaborative, where there was discussion of both the Canadian disaster and the ongoing concerns about vehicle traffic and the rail yard at the Ezra Prentice apartments. Bruce, Fritz and Susan then met with Assemblymember Patricia Fahy and spoke about insurance requirements for

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DEC Should Enforce the Rules

by Tom Ellis

New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos responded to a March 4 Albany Times Union editorial with a letter to the editor ten days later.

The editorial titled, "Weak fines, weak message," strongly criticized the DEC's "spotty record on cracking down on local environmental violations." Specifically discussed were the Colonie Landfill, the Port of Coeymans, and the Dunn construction and demolition (C&D) debris landfill in Rensselaer.

The editorial stated: "To be a useful compliance tool, fines need to be high enough to make following the rules the less painful option -- not so low that they can be written of as a cost of doing business.....tough fines should accompany a tough regulatory approach that, if it errs, errs on the side of caution. In Colonie, where DEC has levied \$40,000 in fines against the town and its landfill operator over stormwater violations, the agency is accused of downplaying risks to the Mohawk River in approving the dump's expansion...The DEC needs to strictly enforce the rules...The people of New York need DEC to fight aggressively for our environment. If a business shows itself willing to push against the regulations that keep our communities safe, DEC must push back with all it's got."

In his letter, Commissioner Seggos said the editorial "seriously misses the mark...Our agency does everything within its power to ensure solid waste management facilities operate safely, legally and with minimal local impacts." He insisted the Colonie and Dunn landfills "operate pursuant to strict permits, which DEC issued on the basis of a thorough environmental review and full consideration of public input."

This final statement can easily be proven false. Last year DEC approved a giant expansion

of the Colonie Landfill after ignoring for more than a year, and then denying, repeated requests from the towns of Waterford and Halfmoon, that DEC conduct a formal adjudicatory hearing at which the applicant and opponents would each submit expert testimony, cross examine each other in public under oath, establish the facts for all to see, and assure a much more transparent review than DEC wanted. DEC then granted the expansion despite the landfill being on the Mohawk River bank, and atop a large unlined hazardous waste dump that leaks who knows what into the river. Waterford and Halfmoon, and their residents, did not obtain "a thorough environmental review and full consideration of public input."

As for the Port of Coeymans, the editorial noted the port's owner had expanded "his C&D business without state approval, after he was warned repeatedly not to." Why does DEC not impose large daily fines and/or suspend or revoke the port's permits to force it into compliance?

Rensselaer residents spoke at a 2012 DEC public hearing in opposition to the then-proposed Dunn Landfill. They identified many of the problems now occurring such as the far too close proximity of the dump to the Rensselaer public school, odors, noise, dust, dirt, diesel exhaust, and the immense tractor trailer truck traffic that terrorizes Rensselaer's Partition Street residents. DEC renewed the landfill permit in 2017 without holding public hearings and now says it may not hold hearings in 2022 when the permit next comes up for renewal. How can there be a "full consideration of public input" without public hearings?

Landfill owners and critics can see that DEC, despite having many excellent employees who want to protect the environment, is a paper tiger.

Rensselaer and East Greenbush residents

are enlarging and professionalizing their coalition that is determined to force closure of the Dunn Landfill this Spring.

Bruce Campbell continued from page 3

railroads transporting oil, the hazards of single-person train crews, and the extent to which state governments might be able to enact legislation on these subjects. That evening, people from Save the Pine Bush and other organizations got together with the out-of-town visitors for dinner. On March 22, Bruce, Fritz and Susan met with Rep. Paul Tonko who appeared quite interested in what Fritz and Bruce were saying about how de-regulation and changes in the railroad industry have decreased safety.

Dinner Schedule

at the Westminster Presbyterian Church,
85 Chestnut Street, Albany, NY
Wednesday, April 17, 2019
Wednesday, May 15, 2019
Wednesday, June 19, 2019
No dinner in July
Wednesday, August 21, 2019
Wednesday, September 18, 2019
Wednesday, October 16, 2019
Wednesday, November 20, 2019
Wednesday, December 18, 2019

Save the Pine Bush Dinners Now Available on iTunes!

THE INTERNET: Can't make it to the Save the Pine Bush dinner? Missed the excellent talk in March on Lac Mégantic? Now, you will be able to listen to the Save the Pine Bush dinner speakers on iTunes! Subscribe to "Dinner with Save the Pine Bush." Or listen on your computer at: http://www.savethepinebush.org/Podcasts/Podcast_Index.html

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