

Ombudsman Program Working, Secretary Gail Shaffer Says

BY RON ROBERTSON
New York Secretary of State Gail E. Shaffer was in the North Country last week touting the state's ombudsman program and promoting an organization for women office holders.

Shaffer honored women who hold governmental office at a reception that followed a March 30 news conference at Clarkson University.

The ombudsman program, she said, was started on an ad hoc basis by Gov. Mario M. Cuomo when he was secretary of state. The ad hoc program continued when he became lieutenant governor.

When Cuomo became governor, Shaffer said, "he believed so much in the program that he decided to institutionalize it in state government."

Shaffer said she was designated state ombudsman by executive order and the heads of other agencies were ordered to cooperate with the program.

The services have expanded since the 1983 executive order, she said. "Regional offices will be established in the next few months," she said.

Shaffer said she was designated state ombudsman by executive order and the heads of other agencies were ordered to cooperate with the program.

The program started with 7,300 cases in 1983 and expanded to 40,000

cases four years later, Shaffer said.

"We do find it is a service very much in demand. Once people know about our office, they will utilize it and it does resolve problems on the average quite quickly," she said.

The program, she said, does "everything from A to Z" and helps "people find their way through the maze of bureaucracy that modern government has become."

When someone gets the run-around and can't seem to find satisfaction with state government, she said, "sometimes we end up being a kind of court of last resort."

"So we're there to intercede and try to get things back on track."

Because it hears so many complaints and questions about the state government system, Shaffer said, the ombudsman program acts as a watchdog on the system to make sure it's working properly and can suggest ways to improve it.

"It's an exciting program. I feel because it helps to restore people's faith in government and demonstrates how government can be responsive to the needs of the community," she said.

To reach the state ombudsman office toll free, call 800-828-2338. Locally, Dodge's office can be reached at 267-2075.

Women Office Holders
Shaffer said she has helped form an organization called the Statewide Association of Women Office Holders to help serve the relatively few women who hold public office.

"The reason we decided we need something like this is because women are moving ahead very, very slowly" in politics, she said.

Only 5 percent of the members of Congress are women, she said, as are 10 percent of the state legislators and three of the states' 50 governors.

"For 53 percent of the population, we do not have nearly our proportionate share of the power," she said.

Shaffer is touring the state with Gail Brewer, chair of the Statewide Women's Political Caucus, to promote the association.

Part of the purpose of the association, Shaffer said, is to create a supportive "old girl" network among women office holders and seekers.

"Women are really new in these

non-traditional roles," she said. "Very often women are not welcomed into the football huddle in the same way that a new male colleague is."

The association helps provide new office holders with executive skills development and peer-to-peer training with more experienced politicians, Shaffer said.

"We share that experience and we build the strength of those women in performing their jobs well so that hopefully when those opportunities arise," they will be able to move up the political ladder, she said.

"We will have a farm team of women to move on up into those higher positions as they grow in their experience," Shaffer said.

Brewer noted that "in order to help women move up, you have to work together on the local level."

Many women office holders, said Brewer, have never met together as women, even those serving on the same governmental bodies.

Campaign financing is a major problem for women and minority office holders, she said, and she said she had difficulty raising the vast amounts of funds

"Once that happens," Shaffer said, "you're going to see more women run successfully. You're going to see more parity in the power structure."

Then, she said, "you're going to see a lot of family and women's issues come to the front burner instead of the back burner of public policy."



PLAYTIME — Monday afternoon's brief sunny periods brought several children out to play at Potsdam's Our Own Playground on the lawn of Lawrence Avenue Elementary School. (Ron Robertson photo)

Zoners' Action May Have Been Improper, Lekki Says

BY RON ROBERTSON
Potsdam's village attorney said Monday that action by the zoning board of appeals to grant variances and a special use permit to allow a girls' fraternity to live at 82-84 Market St. was probably improper.

A meeting scheduled to reconsider the application is also probably improper, Village Attorney Peter Lekki said.

Lekki, who was directed to investigate the zoning board's March 17 actions that granted the variances and permit, reported to the village board at its meeting Monday night.

Wendell and Alice Matott, Winthrop Road, have applied for a special permit to rent the property to Phi Mu, which is technically a fraternity but with all-female membership.

This week the zoning board will convene a second hearing on the application, this time including public announcement of the need for a variance to the lot depth requirement for group dwellings in a two-family residential zone.

Any action taken to reverse the zoning board's decision, Lekki said, would have to be by the zoning board itself or through state Supreme Court action by the village board or any aggrieved village resident.

"State law goes not give the village board the authority to override the zoning board" except through court action, Lekki said.

Any action taken in Supreme Court, he said, would have to be taken by April 16, 30 days after the zoning board's action.

Village board members said they were not prepared Monday night to decide whether to initiate court action against the appeals board.

Mayor Paul Claffey instructed Lekki and Village Administrator Robert Burns to continue to pursue the matter.

The mayor said he would convene a special board meeting if the two officials decide action is necessary.

Lekki and Burns said they would advise the zoning board of the attorney's opinion before the new hearing.

State law allows a zoning board to reconsider an application if new facts or evidence arise. The action could also be reversed if all parties agreed the permit was null and void, the attorney said.

To his knowledge, Lekki said, there will be no new facts or evidence presented at a new hearing on the application slated for 7:30 p.m. on Thursday. A meeting, during which the application is scheduled to be discussed, will follow the hearing.

"The zoning board of appeals has initiated a new hearing," Lekki said. "I'm not persuaded they can do that."

"The (zoning) board is apparently trying to correct a problem they perceive they have," he said.

The zoning board's approval of the special permit came under fire by a village trustee because applications were not filed for variances that were granted. Public announcement of the variance applications was also not made prior to the first hearing.

The zoning board had granted front yard parking, lot depth, and rear yard setback variances to the owners during its March 17 meeting. The variances allowed the application to meet the necessary requirements for the special use permit.

A special permit is necessary to allow fraternity or sorority houses in either two- or multiple-family zones.

The current site plan, revised through negotiations with the village's planning board, shows the need for only the lot depth variance.

Trustee Helen Brouwer led the call by the village board at its March 21 meeting for Lekki to investigate whether the zoning board's approval of the variance was proper. Brouwer resides at 88 Market St.

The revised site plan calls for a planned wing to extend from the house at 84 Market to a garage on the nearly-vacant 82 Market. Both the wing and the garage were moved forward several feet from their position on the original site plan.

This enables parking to be moved from the side of the 82 Market lot facing Pleasant Street, which is technically a front yard, and moves the garage and the wing from where it was too close to a rear property line.

Trustees Appoint Rogers As Justice

BY RON ROBERTSON
The Potsdam Village Board Monday night appointed Kathleen Martin Rogers to continue in her village justice post until Dec. 5.

Rogers' regular term expired March 31. A special law signed by Gov. Mario Cuomo that day allowed the village to appoint a justice until after the November election.

Last year the village switched all elections from March to November and extended the terms of village board members to Dec. 5, the new date for the annual organizational meeting.

The village board is not empowered to extend a justice term, so special legislation was needed.

Rogers has announced her bid for county Surrogate Court judge and faces a primary battle against fellow Republican Charles Palm. Rogers has said that if she loses the primary, she would consider running again for village justice, a post she has held for one four-year term.

Other items for which extensions were granted to Dec. 5 included:

- The regular dates and times for village board meetings.
- The business hours of village offices.
- The designation of official newspapers and banks.
- The authorization for investment of surplus funds of village accounts in certificates of deposits.
- The authorization to fix amounts of surety bonds for village officials and personnel.
- The authorization for the mayor, treasurer, and deputy treasurer to sign checks for the village.

Before this year, all these items would have been taken care of at the first meeting in April, but because of the change to November elections all organizational matters were extended to Dec. 5.

In other, non-organizational, matters, the board:

- Set a public hearing for 6:45 p.m. April 18 on a local law that

removes the cost of the residential trash collection service from the budget and makes it a service for which a quarterly fee is paid.

- Set a hearing for 7 p.m. April 18 on a law that would increase the sewer rate from \$1.65 to \$1.90 per 1,000 gallons.
- Set a hearing for 7:15 p.m. April 18 on a law that would require Niagara Mohawk and St. Lawrence Gas to advise the village whenever multiple meters are installed in village residences.
- Authorized the treasurer to pay some \$250 to O'Brien and Gere engineers for services performed from Nov. 29 to Jan. 23 in connection with a hydroelectric plant study.
- Authorized payment of some \$1,300 to O'Brien and Gere for work performed from Nov. 29 to Feb. 20 in connection with a dam stability analysis.

At Potsdam College

Flora MacDonald Will Receive Honorary Degree

Flora Isabel MacDonald, Canada's Minister of Communications, will be in Potsdam on May 8 to receive an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree at Potsdam College's spring commencement ceremony.

Minister MacDonald's career in Canada's national government has included both elective and appointed positions and has spanned the terms of several prime ministers. A member of Parliament since 1972, she has served in Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's cabinet since 1984, first as a Minister of Employment and Immigration and now as Minister of Communications.

Her duties as Minister of Communications include cultural

responsibilities such as promoting expansion in Canada's production of motion pictures. A current project aims to improve the process of making French-soundtrack films accessible to English-speaking audiences and vice versa.

MacDonald entered politics in 1956 as a staff member at the Progressive-Conservative party headquarters in Ottawa. By 1960 she had been named executive director, a position she resigned in 1965 to become National Secretary of the Progressive-Conservative Association while serving as an administrator and tutor in the political science department of Queen's University in Kingston from 1966 to 1969.

She attended Empire Business College and in 1972 became the first woman to complete the National

Defense College course in Canadian and international studies.

MacDonald has served as her party's spokesperson for Indian affairs, the development of northern Canada, and housing and urban development issues.

As a member of Parliament she has spoken out on constitutional issues, on national defense, external affairs and reform of Canada's penitentiary system. In the brief Joe Clark government (1979-1980) she served as Secretary of State for External Affairs, an important federal post the likes of which had never before been held by a woman.

Besides recognizing the outstanding contributions of an individual, the conferral of the SUNY honorary doctorate to Minister MacDonald is a recognition by the State of New York that its citizens and Canadians are close geographic and cultural neighbors whose relationship is one of mutual trust and goodwill.

The State University of New York awards honorary doctorates to individuals whose personal and professional achievements exemplify SUNY's motto: "To Learn, To Search, To Serve." Since the State University's founding in 1948, over one million New Yorkers, other Americans and residents of nations around the world have contributed to and benefited from this threefold educational mission by earning State University of New York degrees.

Villages, Town Plan 2nd 'Sharing' Session

BY BETSY BAKER
April 14 has been set for a second meeting of Potsdam town and village, and Norwood village officials, to discuss sharing equipment and other resources.

Potsdam Town Supervisor Gene Brundage had the idea of sharing equipment among the three municipalities; he organized and chaired the first meeting several weeks ago.

Brundage said that first meeting led to savings of between \$58,000 and \$100,000 for township taxpayers through the sharing of equipment already owned.

"I'm really pleased. I figure in an hour and a half we saved the taxpayers between fifty-eight and a hundred thousand dollars. If we can do that we can do a lot more in another hour and a half," Brundage said.

Brundage said the first meeting dealt with sharing equipment only, but he noted he hopes more ways to share will be developed in future meetings.

At the first meeting, Brundage said, the Village of Potsdam made its street sweeper available to the Village of Norwood; the Town of Potsdam and Village of Norwood made compressors available to Potsdam village; the town agreed to lend Norwood a grad-all and driver for work in that village; and Norwood and the town will make rollers available to Potsdam village while the village overhauls its roller.

Police Raising Funds For Super Cops Run

Potsdam village police officers will be at Ames Big N Plaza from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday to raise funds for the upcoming Super Cops Run to benefit area Special Olympics athletes.

According to Patrolman David Fenton, he, Patrolman Mike Knowlton, and Lt. Terry McKendree will participate in the May 14 360-mile relay run around the county.

The trio will join other law enforcement officials from various county departments in running four mile relay legs through some 34 towns.

The event is designed to raise funds for equipment, food transportation and uniforms for Area 27 Special Olympics athletes from St. Lawrence and Franklin counties. The athletes will compete at Potsdam College May 14, 15 and 16.

Thygesen Named To SUNY Post

Professor Kenneth Thygesen of the Potsdam College physics department has been named adjunct professor of physics at the State University of New York at Albany, according to SUNY Albany president Vincent O'Leary.

Professor Thygesen is currently involved in collaborative research with Dr. Walter M. Gibson of SUNY Albany, for which Thygesen recently received a \$15,000 support grant through SUNY's Organized Research Initiatives Program.

Three School Board Seats To Be Decided

April 18 is the deadline for residents of the Potsdam Central School District to file nominating petitions for three seats on the district's board of education.

Petitions must bear the signatures of at least 25 qualified voters of the district, and must be turned in to the office of Superintendent Gary Snell at Potsdam High School.

District voters will decide on a spending plan for 1988-89, and choose three school board members, on May 18, following the annual meeting on the 17th.

Incumbents are A. George Davis and Judith Rich (five year terms). A one year term is also to be filled, following the resignation of Harold Sharlow for job-related reasons.



GIRLS' FRATERNITY — An application that would transform the above house at 84 Market St. and the adjacent lot at 82 Market (to the right of the house) into a house for the Phi Mu girls' fraternity will again

be before the village's zoning board on Thursday. The owners reapplied for the necessary permits after the zoning board's approval of the first application came under fire. (Ron Robertson photo)