

# Macomb Councilman's Past Record Tells Grim Tale

**BY JIM REAGEN**  
**MACOMB** — Stephen Burke, a Macomb town councilman who wants St. Lawrence County's Democratic party to support his bid for the state assembly, reportedly had a colorful career in Long Island Republican politics checked by allegations of bribery-taking and political influencing-peddling.

Last fall, the 51-year-old Bishop Road resident entered St. Lawrence County politics by winning a seat on the Macomb town board as a Democrat. Since then, St. Lawrence County Democrats have been talking about possibly fielding Burke as a candidate for the state assembly or as a candidate next year for the county legislature against Hammond's Allen Dunham (R-District 9).

But his career as a member of the Long Island's Brookhaven town council ended less than three years ago when he was found innocent by a Suffolk County Jury of taking \$6,000, part of a \$12,000 bribe investigation he solicited for his help in rezoning an industrial property.

Burke told the jury he was innocent, describing the \$6,000 as a "campaign contribution." He defended his decision to go to a secluded churchyard to accept the \$6,000, testifying that "taking \$6,000 is not what you want to do in the open."

Originally from Brooklyn, Burke changed from being a Democrat to a Republican when he started his political career on Long Island. He had studied police science at City College of New York, worked as a U.S. Customs investigator, was employed as a private investigator for insurance companies, and operated a wholesale-retail meat market in Bellmore on Long Island, where he was married and had four children.

Burke purchased a dairy farm in Macomb seven years ago, while he was still active politically in Long Island. County Democratic Party Chairman Vernon (Sam) Burns said this morning "he's new. I think he's got a bright political

future ahead of him in St. Lawrence County. I'm sure Steve Burke's going to be around for a long time."

Burns said county Democrats picked County Legislator Allen Risho of Ogdensburg to run for the state assembly instead of Burke. "It's too bad we had to choose one over the other," said Burns. "Steve Burke, of course, has an excellent background to run for office."

Democrats are describing him as a rising star in county Democratic circles, although a review of Burke's political career raises questions about Burke.

The following is a chronology of some of the highlights of Burke's career from the files of Newsday, Long Island's daily newspaper.

1969-1972 — Served on the Middle County school board.

September 9, 1975, Burke was defeated in the Republican primary in his bid for a seat on the Suffolk county legislature.

1977 — Defeated in his bid for a seat on the Suffolk County Legislature.

1978 — Defeated in a bid for the New York State Assembly from Suffolk County.

1979 — Elected to the Brookhaven town council.

July 31, 1980 — Newsday, Long Island's daily newspaper, revealed that shortly after Burke took office as a member of Brookhaven's town board, Burke personally arranged to have all repair work on Brookhaven's 240 town vehicles done at a Mount Sinai firm whose officers reportedly included his top campaign official.

Burke personally sponsored a resolution awarding the firm an exclusive contract based on bid specifications that were opposed by the town attorney.

Burke ordered "all repair work switched to his friend's firm immediately after he took office, several weeks before bids were even solicited."

Newsday reported that Burke had received two loans totalling \$1,345 from the secretary of the company during his unsuccessful

1978 political campaign for the state assembly.

She accepted \$127.24 as full payment for the loans.

Burke defended the contract award, saying the president of the company was a "political and social friend."

"He's contributed to my campaigns, been a very good friend, been active and he's a decent person," Burke said of the award.

"It's damn nice to be able to throw around a little patronage," said a town employee in charge of maintaining the town's vehicle fleet.

Burke said the firm would save taxpayers money, although a few years after the Newsday investigation, the town council decided to create its own vehicle maintenance office.

June 18, 1980, Burke removed the locked door of Brookhaven's Town Local Law Enforcement Director because Burke said he was upset the director had refused to provide a key to his office to employees in the department.

March 17, 1980 — was criticized for adding 24 part-time workers to the town's Ski Bowl during one of the worst seasons when attendance was down 1,500 and revenues were down.

Feb. 18, 1981 — Burke was charged with crashing into the car of the estranged husband of a female friend of Burke's, Pamela Heilrick, after the man took pictures of Burke's car while it was parked at the woman's house at 1 a.m. Burke was charged with reckless endangerment and leaving the scene of an incident. Burke denied the charges, claiming that he ran out of the house when he saw the man photographing his car. Burke accused the man of slamming his car into Burke's car and driving away. Burke said he never reported the incident to police because it only caused minor damage.

The man claimed that after Burke saw him photographing his car, Burke chased him several miles, tailgating him, and rammed into his car at least three times.

The charges were dropped.

Dec. 29, 1981 — Burke was rapped by Suffolk County Civil Service officials because he was allowing the department's security guards, who were active politically, to work excess hours in violation of civil service laws prohibiting part-time workers from working full time.

Burke defended the practice, arguing that both Democrats and Republicans used the security jobs as patronage plums for party workers.

"You get the first consideration for security guard positions if you pay your dues at election time," he said.

1982 — Described in an article as carrying a Smith and Wesson revolver.

Jan. 6, 1982 — Introduced a resolution to award \$192,000 in no-bid town insurance contracts to a former GOP town councilman.

Burke defended the deal, saying the former councilman had no political connections.

"He's a nice guy and a former councilman and we thought, it would be good to pass it around."

Town officials decided not to award the bids competitively because they said they didn't have time.

April 28, 1982 — Burke and two town council members had their taxpayer-paid-for town cars equipped with radio scanners. Burke had also had the town install license plates that did not identify the cars as being owned by the town.

"Because when town cars were parked in front of restaurants sometimes people have a tendency to call and complain and say 'I saw them drinking with the town car outside,'" Burke said the car was parked at restaurants while he attended meetings.

Feb. 12, 1983 — Burke and several other officials staged what Burke described as a "midnight raid" on the town's animal shelter because they had heard reports that money and dogs were missing. Dubbed the "Canine Caper" by

the press, Burke personally broke down the door of the animal shelter director's office. Burke told officials later he broke down the door because he said he heard "a little pussy cat crying and he smelled smoke," the town's supervisor later reported. Burke later agreed to reimburse the town \$243.50 to replace the door.

The shelter's supervisor was later cleared of wrongdoing by a grand jury.

April 14, 1983 — Burke was arrested for soliciting a \$12,000 bribe from a businessman seeking a rezoning.

Burke was arrested by detectives assigned to the district attorney's racketeering bureau at a graveyard after he had been handed \$6,000 as a down payment for the bribe.

Detectives said Burke had told them he could get a rezoning for his business for \$12,000. The businessman contacted the DA's office about the bribe solicitation, and wired him to allow them to tape record the deal in the graveyard.

Sept. 17, 1983 — Burke admitted in court papers that he took the bribe, but asked State Supreme Court in pre-trial motions to dismiss the charges, claiming that he was trapped by law enforcement officials.

"The defendant further contends that he presented and continued to present for a long period of time a reluctance to commit a crime, but his reluctance was overcome by protestations of friendship, persistent solicitations and by the temptation of exorbitant gain." The court refused to dismiss the charges, and ordered Burke to stand trial.

Jan. 30, 1984 — During the bribery trial, Burke changes his story from his testimony in September during pre-trial motions, claiming the money was not a bribe. Instead, Burke said the money was a campaign contribution that would have gone into a special fund known as a housekeep-

ing account for which detailed accounting and public reports do not need to be done. Brookhaven Republicans dismissed Burke's claims, saying no such account existed.

Jan. 31, 1984 — Burke insists that he decided to take the \$6,000 after he was pressured by a GOP leader to help rezone the property.

"Michael just kept throwing money at me," Burke testified.

He was acquitted by a jury.

Feb. 1, 1984 — During the trial, Burke admitted he had another home and family in Macomb, in addition to his home and family in Long Island. Burke admitted he filed an insurance claim for \$4,500 in connection with the birth of his son, Stephen Jr.

Burke listed the child's mother, Pamela Rawlins, as his wife, and named her Pamela Burke on the insurance claim, even though he was married to Ann Burke, who lived in the couple's home on Long Island with their four children. Trial testimony showed he maintained a farm in Macomb with Ms. Rawlins, which he did not list on a town financial disclosure form.

Feb. 4, 1984 — The jury acquits Burke on the charge, saying that two key prosecution witnesses could not be believed.

"Steve Burke came across as a pretty good man who was induced by these characters and I didn't think he should take any punishment," a juror said after the trial. The jurors said they believed Burke's claim that he decided to accept the money after he had already agreed to help with the rezoning. They said they did not consider it a bribe.

June 5, 1986 — Newsday reported that Burke was trying to stage a political comeback by asking St. Lawrence County Democrats to run him for the Assembly.

A Brookhaven Democratic Party Chairman Richard Bloch said "the reason he has probably decided to run up in that area is there are a lot of secluded cemeteries."

## AISES Chapter Chooses Zanin Runner-Up For Service Award

The Clarkson University student chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) was recently named first runner-up for the Stelvio J. Zanin Distinguished Chapter Award, receiving \$500 for the honor. The award is presented annually at the AISES national meeting in Seattle, Wash., to the best out of the 44 chapters in the country.

The goal of the AISES student chapters is to provide a professional and career focus for American Indian college students," says Chapter President Laura J. Finehout, but she notes that other factors are also taken into consideration when naming the best of these chapters. One of the most important is a commitment to quality activities, like those conducted at Clarkson. The university group sponsors an American Indian Week exhibit on campus, helps local high school students with their career and education plans, and publishes a newsletter which is distributed to AISES college students and alumni. The AISES students are also given the opportunity to meet with representatives of large corporations like General Electric, IBM and Kodak, to discuss career opportunities.

Clarkson University was one of the first chapters to be linked with

the society's national headquarters in Boulder, Colo., via a computer network. It is also the first AISES student chapter and one of just a few located east of the Mississippi River.



**DISTINGUISHED CHAPTER AWARD** — Laura Finehout (fourth from left), President of the Clarkson University student chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), presents the Stelvio J. Zanin Distinguished Chapter Award to first runner-up Edward T. Misiaszek, chapter advisor and associate dean of engineering at Clarkson. Student chapter members and friends look on in the background.

## Supporters Shocked By Burke

**BY RYNE MARTIN**  
**CANTON** — The chairman of the St. Lawrence County Democratic Committee referred to Macomb Democratic Councilman Stephen Burke as a rising star in Democratic circles early Thursday morning.

But that was before he learned that Stephen Burke, 51, of the Bishop Road in Macomb, had been involved in several scrapes during his political tenure on Long Island. Burke's career as a councilman on Long Island included allegations of bribe taking and influence peddling.

Vernon "Sam" Burns, chairman of the St. Lawrence County Democratic Committee, said he was shocked and surprised to learn of the details the Ogdensburg Journal uncovered when they investigated the Macomb town councilman's background.

"How do you respond to

something like that? I don't know. It's information I certainly was not privy to. It's not the type of thing you want to hear about any elected official," he said.

Burns noted the revelations changed his views of a man who had impressed the county's Democratic leadership. "I would say probably any association we would have with Stephen Burke is over," according to the Democratic chairman.

The Macomb Democrat had not mentioned any of the investigations during his discussions with county Democrats, Burns noted.

"I'm feeling, in a sense, that I've been deceived like a lot of other people. I think he was not honest with all of us in St. Lawrence County. It doesn't matter that he was acquitted. These are things he should have informed us about," Burns pointed out.

St. Lawrence County Democrats saw another side of Burke, ac-

ording to the chairman of the county committee. Burns noted Burke provided a tape of his appearance in CBS's "60 Minutes." The Long Island councilman was calling for a ban on cop killing bullets. "He handled himself quite well," Burns said.

Burke also provided the St. Lawrence County Democratic Committee with a resume, according to Burns. "At no time did he say anything ... It certainly doesn't state any of the things you just-related to me," he said after being told of The Journal's findings.

"I like to think that people out there know me enough to know that if I would have known anything like this I would have said, 'Take a hike, Jack.' That's not the way politics should be run in St. Lawrence County, New York State or the United States," according to the party leader.

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