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Ramapo's Town Hall Without Walls Sparks F.A.A. Action

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One of the most serious problems facing the United States in this day and age is political apathy. Americans are working longer and harder than ever, leaving little time for leisure and civic participation. Consequently, public officials must continually develop strategies to keep their constituents informed and involved. At the start of the decade, the Ramapo Town Board began building its "Town Hall Without Walls", with the goal of bringing Town Government into people's homes via the internet, live cable TV, videostreaming, local radio and interactive on-line activities. Over the last six years, we have broadcast close to 1000 Town Board Meetings, Special Events, Informational Forums. A plethora of non-profit groups, senior citizens, outstanding students and civic organizations have appeared on my Thursday Night "LIVE From Town Hall" TV Show.

Three weeks ago I contacted F.A.A. Airspace Design Project Manager Steve Kelly, inviting him to appear on my TV Show and give County residents specific information about the proposed change in air traffic routes, which would have a profound impact on communities throughout Rockland. Steve informed me that the F.A.A. representatives had conducted 120 hearings on the route changes throughout the metropolitan area, but had no plans to schedule a presentation in Rockland County. Working with Congressman Eliot Engel, I subsequently received word that the F.A.A. would accept my invitation and appear on "LIVE From Town Hall". On Thursday night, July 12th our "Town Hall Without Walls" worked flawlessly. Residents from throughout Rockland viewed the F.A.A. Town Meeting live on cable TV, e-mailed and called in questions for the F.A.A. representatives to answer, many watched the proceedings on their computers via internet videostreaming. Those who attended the meeting and could not get into the Town Council Room viewed the meeting from TV monitors and two 50 inch plasma TV screens which were set up inside and outside Town Hall. The Ramapo Police Department estimates that 600 people were at Town Hall viewing the meeting.

The civility and sophistication of our approach greatly impressed F.A.A. officials, who said it was the most productive meeting they had ever participated in. It came as no surprise to me when Congressman Engel called a few days later to inform me that the F.A.A. would conduct a Town Hall style meeting for all the residents of Rockland County – following the Ramapo model.

I have offered the Joseph T. St. Lawrence Center for the upcoming meeting. Once again we have the capability of broadcasting the proceeding live over cable and the internet. Technology is the conduit to increased civic participation and understanding – shame on us if we do not use it!

Semi-Pro Football at the Saint Center – Saturday, July 21st at 7:30 PM

The Tri-County Bulldogs home opener against Albany will be exciting and a great family activity. Tickets are only \$5.00 – bring your family and friends and enjoy an evening of semi-pro football.

Remembering Councilman Harry Reiss

In closing, this week Ramapo mourns the loss of a truly dedicated public servant Councilman Harry Reiss. Harry was a gentleman and a scholar – the following words of Ralph Waldo Emerson reflect his philosophy of life.

“To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded”. God Bless Harry Reiss, his wife Marion and their entire family.