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Levenberg



Capalbo

‘Shekels’ Remark Mars Assembly Race

*Levenberg seeks re-election
for second term*

By Leonard Sparks

Michael Capalbo began a debate with state Assembly Member Dana Levenberg at the Ossining Library on Oct. 7 by condemning antisemitism and asking spectators to remember the killing and kidnapping of Israelis a year earlier by Hamas.

But a comment he made 11 minutes later overshadowed that gesture. Responding after Levenberg, who is Jewish, spoke of her support for increased funding and municipal aid in this year’s budget, the Republican and Conservative party candidate said: “They throw her some shekels to do some work in her community.”

On Tuesday (Oct. 15), Capalbo said it was a “clumsy use of words” and that he had Jewish supporters attending the debate who took “no offense to it whatsoever.” But Levenberg, whose name appears on the Democratic and Working Families lines, said she was offended. “Especially following his comment about how he’s against antisemitism, I thought it was so tone-deaf,” she said.

The rest of the nearly one-hour debate, organized by the League of Women Voters for Northwest Westchester County, and subsequent telephone interviews this week gave the candidates opportunities to highlight their other contrasts in the race for the 95th District, which includes Philipstown.

Levenberg, who has a campaign cash advantage (\$88,477 to \$11,814), is a former Ossining supervisor and chief of staff to her predecessor, Sandy Galef, who held the seat for 30 years. During Levenberg’s first term, which began in January 2023, she has supported core progressive issues such as the environment, education funding and efforts to build more housing to drive down costs.

She voted for the Climate Change Superfund Act, which the Legislature passed in

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Joseph Biavati (right) with his son, David

Photo by Ross Corsair

Part 1: Modern Immigrants

Why Do They Come?

In a national survey conducted last month by Marist Poll for National Public Radio and PBS News, 44 percent of registered voters said immigration was a deciding factor in whom they support for president. Another 43 percent said it was an important factor. In this series, we examine what draws Latino immigrants to the Highlands, the process they undergo to stay and the effect on local schools.

By Joey Asher

Joseph Biavati crossed the Tijuana border into California 32 years ago hiding in a hay truck. He said he did it because his family was starving in strife-torn Brazil. “We were down to

one meal a day,” he said. “It was half of a chicken for me, my wife and my baby. And a bottle of water. That was it.”

After initially settling in Port Chester, he

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Garrison School Cancels Cakewalk

*Parent expressed concern
about ties to slavery*

By Joey Asher

The cakewalk at the Garrison School PTA’s annual Fall Festival has been canceled out of concern that it is insensitive to Black people.

This year’s festival is scheduled for Saturday (Oct. 19) from noon to 2 p.m.

While there are many accounts of the origin of cakewalks, most say they date to the 19th century when slaves would dance in a circle in what may have begun as a mockery of the formal dancing of planta-

tion owners. The best dancers won a cake. The cakewalk later became a regular part of minstrel shows, with whites performing in blackface. The phrase “takes the cake” comes from the cakewalk.

In the PTA cakewalk, which had been part of the festival for at least 10 years, participants purchased tickets to walk in a circle, stepping on markers with numbers while music played. When the music stopped, a number was drawn and whoever was standing on that number could select a homemade cake. The game continued until all the donated cakes were taken.

This year, a parent expressed concern

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Fjord Trail Data Committee Issues Report

*Projects visitation starting
in 2033*

By Brian PJ Cronin

After 14 months of work, the Visitation Data Committee, an independent group representing Philipstown, Beacon and Fishkill, has approved a report for the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail.

The committee, created by HHFT to review its traffic and pedestrian data and projections for the proposed 7.5-mile linear park between Long Dock Park in Beacon and Dockside Park in Cold Spring, met for the first time in August 2023 at Little Stony Point.

The 11-member committee selected and worked with BFJ Planning to examine

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WINNING GOURD — Tim Hetrick, who lives in Fishkill, poses with his winning field pumpkin from judging in August at the Dutchess County Fair. Hetrick also won first place for his white onions and second place for his garlic. The pumpkin will be carved for Halloween, which Hetrick admits will be difficult not only for himself and his children (who attend Rombout Middle School and Beacon High School) but his wife, Kelly, “who’s attached to all our pumpkins.”

Photo by Tayler Smith

Immigration *(from Page 1)*

moved his family in 2004 to Philipstown for the same reason so many others come to the Highlands: the public schools.

When his son David was diagnosed with autism, a doctor told him that Haldane was well-equipped to help children with special needs. David, born in the U.S., didn't speak until age 4 and exhibited curious behaviors like lining up his puzzle pieces in a row like a train. The therapists and teachers at Haldane made great strides with David, teaching him how to communicate and interact with others, his father said. "They were fantastic," he said.

David graduated from Haldane three years ago as an honor roll student.

Biavati's journey is similar to many undocumented immigrants who live in the Highlands but doesn't conform to the hot-button and often racist rhetoric of the political season.

According to state data, recent immigrants from Central and South America have not brought crime to the region. Rather, except for their legal status, they are like new residents who migrate from other U.S. counties and states seeking a better life in the suburbs, affordable housing and quality schools. The difference is that undocumented immigrants usually fill the lowest-paying jobs.

49

Percentage of immigrants to the U.S. who are naturalized citizens

28

Percentage who are lawful temporary or permanent residents

23

Percentage who are undocumented

Source: Pew Research Center, citing U.S. Census Data

A January report by the Immigration Research Initiative, a nonpartisan think tank, said the most common jobs for newly arrived immigrants are domestic workers, janitors, waiters, truck drivers, cashiers, couriers and messengers. After five or 10 years, the most common jobs are home health aide and retail sales.

An estimated 850,000 undocumented immigrants — meaning they do not have work permits or green cards — live in New York state, mostly in New York City, according to the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. How many have come to the Highlands is unknown. But if immigration court data is indicative, the numbers have risen dramatically over the past two decades. As of August, there were nearly 400 new immigration cases involving Putnam County residents, according to the Transaction Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University (TRAC). In 2004, there were 34 cases filed during the entire year.

The numbers for Dutchess are similar. As of August, there were 779 immigration cases. In 2004, there were 33. About 75 percent of those cases involve immigrants from Central and South America, according to TRAC.

At the same time, there has been a dramatic



Delma Perera

Photo by J. Asher

rise in the Latino population in Putnam and Dutchess counties. In Dutchess, Hispanics comprised 15 percent of the population in 2022 compared to 4 percent three decades earlier, according to U.S. Census data. Hispanics are 20 percent of the population in Beacon; in 1992 they were 14 percent.

In Putnam, the population was 19 percent Hispanic in 2022 compared to 3 percent in 1992. In the U.S., an estimated 13 percent of Latinos are undocumented, while 87 percent are U.S. citizens or legal residents.

Immigrants come to the Highlands and the Hudson Valley seeking "the good life," said Allan Wernick, an attorney who founded CUNY Citizenship NOW, the nation's largest university-based legal assistance program. "Undocumented immigrants are looking for the same thing that all of us are looking for, a safe place where the kids can get a good education and a place where they can find work."

The good life was the reason Renato Saldaña immigrated from Cuenca, Ecuador, where he earned \$300 a month in his chosen trade of embroidering clothing. In 2009 he paid "coyotes" (human smugglers) \$12,500 and left his wife and two daughters to embark on a 2½-month odyssey with stops in Panama, Honduras and Mexico. He crossed the border at McAllen, Texas, hiding in the sleeper of a tractor-trailer.

He wound his way to Philipstown, where he found a small apartment on Route 9D just north of the Appalachian Market. His first job was on a Peekskill garbage truck before finding work at a clothing manufacturer in Yorktown Heights. When his daughters arrived in 2017, he sent them to Haldane High School, where they graduated with honors. Living in Cortlandt, Saldaña is trying to start his own embroidery business.

How does he feel about moving to the U.S.? "It's a good country," said Saldaña, through a translator. "It would be better without the racism. But we also have problems in our own country. We are better off here."

The Saldañas are among the thousands who have come to the area from Ecuador, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico and Honduras, the most common countries for immigrants to Putnam and Dutchess counties, according to TRAC. Non-Hispanic immigrants come to the area, as well, but not in nearly the same numbers.

What most of these immigrants do once they're here is clear: low-paying work.

"They're doing the jobs that no one else wants to do, that are the backbone of our economy," said Brahvan Ranga, political director of Make the Road New York, which advocates for immigrants.

One of those low-paid workers was Delma Perera, who earned \$8 an hour when she came to the U.S. in 2002 from Uruguay, overstaying a tourist visa. That was four times what she could make as a teacher back home, she said, adding that her original plan was to earn enough money to return to Uruguay and buy a home.

She settled in Ossining before moving to Peekskill and then Philipstown. What did she do to make money? "Anything," she recalled. "If you wanted me to clean the pool, I would clean the pool. I would clean houses. I was a waiter at a graduation party."

Perera, who recently moved to Wappingers Falls, is now a certified nurse assistant who works as a home health care aide. She earns \$15 to \$25 an hour.

While many take low-paying jobs, one thing immigrants don't seem to do often is commit crimes. In Putnam, the number of recorded violent crimes has remained steady at four to six per 10,000 residents for 20 years, according to federal crime statistics. In Dutchess, they stayed at 20 to 22 per 10,000 residents.

"Immigrants make places safer," said Joseph Lavetsky, an immigration attorney based in Beacon, because the last thing most immigrants want is to attract the attention of law enforcement. Criminal activity can get you deported, he said. Arrests for violent crime, drunk driving or even jumping subway turnstiles undermine attempts to get work permits and green cards, the first steps toward citizenship.

\$21,000

Median annual income for a newly arrived immigrant in the lower Hudson Valley

\$35,000

Median income after five years for immigrants outside New York City

Source: Immigration Research Institute, 2021 figures adjusted for inflation

Meanwhile, many undocumented immigrants pay taxes. In 2022, undocumented immigrants paid \$96.7 billion in federal, state and local taxes, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. New York State collects \$3.1 billion in taxes from immigrants, with each paying an average of about \$9,000, according to ITEP.

Renato Saldaña said he started paying taxes in 2014 after learning he could get what the IRS calls an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number. Indeed, attorneys routinely advise undocumented immigrants to pay their taxes and keep careful records as a way of documenting their good faith when they apply for work permits and green cards.

"I pay my taxes every single year," said Perera, who has a work permit. "I follow the rules. But I cannot vote."

Next week: *The path to staying*

Where are the Asylum-Seekers?

In May 2023, Orange County legislators and activist groups such as For the Many and Beacon Climate Action Now spearheaded donation drives and offered other support for nearly 200 immigrants bused from New York City to two hotels in the Town of Newburgh and the Red Roof Inn on Route 9 in Poughkeepsie.

New York City was struggling to shelter more than 60,000 new asylum-seekers, some of them ordered bused from Texas by Gov. Greg Abbott. The city argued that the law allowed it, "as a last resort," to send immigrants upstate.

Most asylum-seekers come from Latin American countries such as Ecuador and Colombia, and many are from Africa (e.g., Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania), China, Russia and Haiti. Venezuelans fleeing poverty, crime and political repression make up the largest share of immigrants coming to New York City.

Orange County and the Town of Newburgh responded to the New York City arrivals by suing the hotels, and the county executives in Dutchess and Putnam prohibited them from housing asylum-seekers. Dutchess also sued New York City.

None of the immigrants were sent to Putnam County, but on July 5, the Legislature voted 7-1 to ban New York City from using in-county lodging as shelters.

By a second 7-1 vote, the legislators declared Putnam as a "rule of law" county and pledged cooperation with federal immigration officials to identify criminals. The resolution emphasized that Putnam "is not a sanctuary county."

That vote enshrined as policy executive orders issued by County Executive Kevin Byrne, who said they were necessary "to protect life and property" because of a "reasonable apprehension of immediate danger."

Nancy Montgomery, who represents Philipstown and part of Putnam Valley as the Legislature's sole Democrat, cast the two "no" votes.

New York City said in September that it had 61,700 asylum-seekers living at 212 city-funded shelters and hotels. The city is also paying for rooms for 1,437 immigrants outside New York City, down from a peak of 2,263 in February.

In an Oct. 3 court filing, the city said that it plans to resettle immigrants sheltered at upstate hotels by the end of the year. Over the summer, city and state officials said that those individuals and families who are not given permanent housing could be allowed to return to New York City and re-enter the shelter system.

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Will Biavati displays the work permit he received through DACA. Photo by J. Asher

Part 2: Modern Immigrants

The Path to Staying

In a national survey conducted last month by Marist Poll for National Public Radio and PBS News, 44 percent of registered voters said immigration was a deciding factor in whom they support for president. Another 43 percent said it was an important factor. In this series, we examine what drew recent immigrants to the Highlands, the process they undergo to stay and the effect on local schools.

By Joey Asher

Growing up in Cold Spring, Will Biavati looked and sounded like most of his friends. His skin was white like most of his Haldane classmates. His English was perfect with no trace of an accent. “I fit in with the local demographic,” said Biavati, who graduated in 2010. “No one could ever tell me apart.” But Biavati had a secret that did set him apart: He was undocumented. He is Brazilian, smuggled across the Tijuana border at age 11, hiding in a van with his mother. That was his second immigration violation. The first came 10 years earlier when he overstayed a tourist visa with his parents. Living in the shadows, Biavati said, the family code was to keep quiet, hoping

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Housing Authority Has New Leadership

Beacon agency helps lower-income residents

By Jeff Simms

Veronica Schetter, who started two months ago as executive director of the Beacon Housing Authority, says she’s focused on hearing from as many voices as possible while helping people navigate an increasingly complex housing marketplace. Schetter is in a new position after taking over for Roland Traudt, who retired in August after 16 years with the agency, but the surroundings are familiar. She has

been with the Housing Authority for 27 years, “quietly working behind the scenes.” It’s the only job she’s ever had. “I hope to learn what misconceptions may be out there,” Schetter said. “I plan to open my door to the folks who participate in our programs, to hear about any barriers they’re experiencing.” Schetter grew up in Glenham, the hamlet that borders Beacon’s east side, and graduated from Beacon High School. She earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from SUNY New Paltz. The Housing Authority was created in

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Rolison



Valdés Smith

State Senate Candidates Square Off

Rising costs top concern for Rolison, Valdés Smith

By Leonard Sparks

With the price of essentials such as housing and energy rising unabated, state Sen. Rob Rolison and his challenger, Yvette Valdés Smith, each say affordability is a crucial problem as they battle for a state Senate seat representing the 39th District, which includes Beacon and Philipstown. When speaking with voters, a major concern is “not being able to pay bills or deciding on [paying for] groceries or my Central Hudson bill,” said Valdés Smith, a former teacher whose district on the Dutchess County Legislature includes Ward 4 in Beacon. The Democrat is also the Legislature’s minority leader. Rolison, a Republican who served as City of Poughkeepsie mayor before defeating Beacon resident Julie Shiroishi in 2022 to win the redrawn 39th District, said reducing the local cost of living is also one of his priorities.

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SUPERSTAR — In a ceremony on Oct. 20, the Garrison Volunteer Ambulance Corp. dedicated a new ambulance to the memory of Louis Lombardo, who died in June at age 81. Lombardo, shown here in his pickup, answered 8,500 calls during his 40 years as a corps member. See Page 17.

Photo by Christine Ashburn

Former Beacon Man Convicted on Jan. 6 Charges

Accused of being leader of local Proud Boys

By Chip Rowe

A federal judge in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday (Oct. 23) found a former Beacon man guilty of five counts related to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. William Joseph Pepe, 35, was identified by prosecutors as president of the Hudson Valley chapter of the Proud Boys, who they said coordinated travel and lodging and, using earpieces and radios to communicate, dismantled barriers and broke

windows. Pepe was arrested six days after the riot and fired from his job at Metro-North in Brewster. The White Plains resident chose to have U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly, rather than a jury, hear the case at trial, which took place in August. Pepe was released until his sentencing, which is scheduled for March 11. Pepe was convicted of a felony (obstructing law enforcement during a civil disorder) and four misdemeanors (obstructing an official proceeding; entering and remaining in a restricted building or grounds; disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building or grounds; and tampering with records, documents or other objects).

Pepe was initially charged in April 2021 with conspiring with two other defendants, Dominic Pezzola of Rochester (sentenced to 10 years in prison) and Matthew Greene of Syracuse (who pleaded guilty and became a government witness). A new indictment issued in April did not contain the conspiracy charge. According to the Justice Department, 1,532 individuals have been charged with crimes related to Jan. 6, including 571 accused of felonies for assaulting or impeding officers. As recently as Tuesday (Oct. 22), the FBI arrested a 41-year-old Ohio man who was charged with assaulting,

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Paths to Legal Status

If you were not born in the U.S. or its territories, you must be naturalized to become a citizen. To do that, you must be a lawful permanent resident (i.e., have a green card) for at least five years, three years if married to a citizen or at basic training if serving in the Armed Forces. You also must pass tests in English language and civics. When a parent is naturalized, their minor children living with them usually become citizens automatically.

In 2023, about 1.2 million people became lawful permanent residents. Fifty-two percent were already living in the U.S.

Family-based

If you have a close relative who is a citizen or has a green card, they can sponsor your application for a green card. The preference is a citizen's unmarried, adult children and their families; a lawful permanent resident's spouse and unmarried children; a citizen's married children and families; and a citizen's adult siblings and families.

The limit is adjusted each year, but the minimum is 226,000. In 2023, there were 756,000 green cards issued to close family members, or 64 percent.

Employment-based

A U.S. employer can request green cards for individuals with extraordinary skills or achievements, professionals with advanced degrees and skilled workers. Some are given in other categories, such as religious workers, employees of the U.S. government abroad and investors in new companies that create at least 10 full-time jobs. In 2023, there were 197,000 employment-based green cards issued, or 17 percent.

Refugees

Refugees are immigrants persecuted or who fear persecution in their native countries because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. The president sets the annual limit, which for 2024 was 125,000. In 2023, about 59,000 refugees received green cards, or 5 percent. In addition, there is a program that allows for "temporary protected status" for residents of 16 countries: Afghanistan, Burma, Cameroon, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Ukraine, Venezuela and Yemen.

Diversity

The government holds a lottery to issue green cards to people from countries that have lower rates of

immigration. In 2023, it provided 67,000 green cards through the program, or about 5.7 percent.

Others

There are other categories, such as the 26,430 Iraqis and Afghans employed by U.S., and their family members, who received green cards in 2023 (2.3 percent), and 19,720 crime victims, such as battered spouses (1.7 percent).

Undocumented

This refers to an immigrant who enters the U.S. "without inspection" by a border agent or overstays a visa. It does not include the 530,000 people in the DACA program, which is considered a temporary fix.

An immigrant can obtain a green card through marriage or having a close relative who is a citizen or green-card holder sponsor the application. (It's unusual for an undocumented immigrant to get an employment-based green card.) But lawful entry may be required; a person who overstayed a visa will have a far easier time than someone who crossed the border clandestinely.

People who enter without being interviewed at a border crossing generally will be forced to leave the U.S. to apply for a green card through a foreign consulate. If they have lived illegally in the U.S. for at least six months, they could be barred from re-entry for three to 10 years. However, they can apply for an exception to the ban if they demonstrate that their absence will create "extreme hardship" for a citizen or lawful permanent resident, such as their spouse or parent.

Since 2013, the government has issued "waivers of inadmissibility for unlawful presence" so that undocumented applicants will have assurances that, if they leave the U.S. for a consular interview, they will be able to return to their families.

Immigration *(from Page 1)*

that "as long as we don't draw attention to ourselves, we can spare ourselves harassment."

So Biavati was known at Haldane as a "quiet kid" who kept to himself and attended few parties. He never let on that he didn't drive or work because undocumented immigrants at the time couldn't get driver's licenses or Social Security numbers.

And forget about dating. "You can't impress someone if you can't pick them up in your car or don't have money to take them out to dinner," said Biavati. "It was a lonely experience."

Everything changed on July 15, 2012, when President Barack Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. His executive order allowed undocumented people who came to the country as children to obtain work permits under certain conditions, such as being enrolled in school, earning a high school or General Educational Development (GED) diploma and having no criminal record.

For Biavati, DACA opened a path to his first job: stocking shelves and working the register at Foodtown in Cold Spring. There he met Ashley Bassett, who graduated from Haldane two years before he did. They married in 2018 in a rooftop wedding in Long Island City and now have a 2-year-old son, Nathan, and live in an apartment in Wappingers Falls.

Biavati, who is a film location scout, is one of 530,000 DACA "dreamers." But it's a tenuous existence. "It could be erased at any moment," he noted. DACA has been repeatedly challenged and its legality is under review by a federal appeals court. As president, Donald Trump tried to end the program and has pledged mass deportations if re-elected.

Finding a path to legal status is challenging for immigrants working and living in the Highlands and lower Hudson Valley. Besides DACA, federal law provides several methods to getting documents, such as a work permit or green card, which allows residency and often leads to citizenship. Those paths include marrying a citizen, receiving asylum from persecution in your native country and hardship exemptions.

It's unclear how many undocumented immigrants live in the Highlands, although there are about 850,000 in New York state, with most in New York City, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C. If immigration court data and census data is indicative, the numbers have risen dramatically over the past two decades in Putnam and Dutchess counties. Most come from Central and South America. About 13 percent of Latinos are undocumented, according to the federal government.

Renata Saldaña lived seven years without documents before getting her green card earlier this year. She came to the U.S. in 2017, at age 17, on a tourist visa. She and her younger sister flew from Ecuador to Florida to visit Universal Studios and tour The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. But they overstayed and eventually moved to Garrison, where her father lived. He had entered the U.S. illegally in 2009.

Why did they come? "For the American dream," she said. "We were living in poverty."

Saldaña and her sister enrolled at Haldane High School. While she spoke



Renato Saldaña with his daughter, Renata
Photo by J. Asher

no English when she arrived, she graduated two years later as a member of the National Honor Society. After high school, she earned an associate degree in business administration at Westchester Community College in Valhalla and became the director of operations for a company that provides uniforms to charter schools.

"Everything I've achieved is as an undocumented person," said Saldaña, who marched on Albany in 2019 advocating for the Green Light Law, which was enacted that December and allows undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses. She has launched a nonprofit, Raíces y Alas (Roots and Wings), to help undocumented people begin their lives in the U.S.

Even though she and her sister came as teenagers, DACA wasn't an option because they arrived after enrollment was closed. Saldaña got a green card because she married a U.S. citizen.

Although that is a common way for foreign nationals to obtain lawful permanent residency, "it's not as easy as saying 'I do,'" noted Joseph Lavetsky, an immigration lawyer based in Beacon.

To get permanent residency through marriage, you must show that you don't have a criminal record, that your spouse can support you and that you've paid income taxes, Lavetsky said. If the immigration authorities suspect a scam, your relationship could be probed with interviews in which the couple is questioned separately, sometimes for hours.

How you entered the country can complicate things. Biavati is protected by DACA but his marriage hasn't helped him get a green card because he has two entry violations that could otherwise require him to leave the country for up to a decade.

Saldaña only had one violation, and that was a legal entry on a tourist visa. She did have to demonstrate that her marriage was authentic with a joint lease, joint insurance and lots of photographs. She met her husband, William Antunes, at a nightclub in Stamford, Connecticut, and the couple now lives in Norwalk. "It was true love," she said. "Even if I couldn't get my documents, I would have married him anyway."

Like many immigrant families, the Saldañas are a mix of legal statuses. Renata's parents and sister remain undocumented, with no clear path to lawful residency. Renata's three youngest siblings are U.S. citizens by birth.

Could Renata's parents leverage their U.S.-

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Immigration *(from Page 20)*

born children to get documents? Maybe, said Lavetsky, “but it’s not as simple as just having an ‘anchor baby.’” At age 21, a child can sponsor a parent’s petition for documentation. But even then, Lavetsky said, the rules are complex and might require the parent to return to his or her home country for 10 years and apply for re-entry. An exception is where deportation would constitute, in the judgment of immigration authorities, “extreme hardship” to the child who is a citizen.

That’s what enabled Will Biavati’s father, Joseph, to emerge. In 2014, Joseph Biavati was at a barbecue when a friend noticed that his son, David, a U.S. citizen by birth, had autism. The friend told Biavati that the autism might help him get documents.

But it was risky. Joseph would have to turn himself in and claim that deportation would be an “extreme hardship” for David. But that’s what he did. His attorney argued that deportation would “turn David’s life completely to hell.”

Biavati also had to show that he had no criminal record and had paid income taxes. “Every immigrant knows, if you one day want to become legal, they’re going to have to prove that they’ve been paying taxes,” said Joseph Biavati, who received a work permit while his case was pending.

Joseph Biavati received his green card in September 2017 and took the citizenship test in Albany on Nov. 5 of last year. On Dec. 5, he took the oath of citizenship at the Bardavon Theater in Poughkeepsie.

Biavati chokes up as he tells the story. “If somebody asks me, isn’t it a good thing to have an autistic son — no, it’s not,” he said, wiping away tears. “But in some ways, it became a blessing for us.”

Meanwhile, Will Biavati remains in legal limbo. “I dream of peace of mind,” he said. “Not just for me — now I have a family. I have a son who depends on me.”

Next week: *The effect on schools*
For Part I, see highlandscurrent.org.

Road Rally Sparks Concern

Mayor: ‘A fair degree of chaos’ in Cold Spring

By Michael Turton

Mayor Kathleen Foley commented at the Wednesday (Oct. 23) meeting of the Cold Spring Village Board on what she described as “a fair degree of chaos” on streets and sidewalks during the previous Saturday as a procession of vehicles in a political rally drove through the village on one of its busiest days of the year.

After gathering in Carmel, the participants drove down Main Street honking horns and waving flags to support former President Donald Trump’s re-election bid.

“The individuals in the caravan were within their rights to travel through Cold Spring; no permit was required,” Foley said. But she said neither the Putnam County Sheriff’s Office nor Philipstown residents who participated informed the Cold Spring Police Department that the caravan was headed to the village. As a result, she said, village police were unprepared.

“While the sheriff may not have known

the intended route of the caravan, for the sake of public safety, his office should have alerted all Putnam County law enforcement agencies to be at the ready for the passage of a large number of vehicles ranging in size from sedans to utility trucks,” Foley said.

Calls from the Cold Spring department for assistance brought New York State troopers and sheriff’s deputies to the scene.

“Thankfully, no one was hurt,” Foley said. “We do not condone belligerent behavior, intimidation or threats of any kind to our staff, our police officers, to our neighbors or toward our visitors.”

Before the mayor’s comments, the board spent more than an hour in executive session, which is closed to the public, to address public safety. Foley declined to say what was discussed.

In an email to *The Current* on Thursday, Foley said there were heated disputes in the street and on sidewalks while the convoy traveled through Cold Spring.

“Police response was particularly difficult because the village was already overwhelmed with visitors,” she said. “Mutual aid units from the Sheriff’s Department and the New York State Police had difficulty

getting into the most heated areas.” She said Cold Spring officers were able to de-escalate confrontations and move the convoy along.

“Meeting aggression with aggression only escalates tensions and delivers what events like this seek: reaction,” Foley said. “This just isn’t how civil discourse happens, regardless of one’s position.”

In other business...

- The board passed a resolution approving temporary changes “to manage and control traffic and respond to emergencies safely within the village” during busy fall weekends. The following changes are in effect on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through Nov. 24, to be implemented by police when deemed necessary: (1) Traffic can be diverted from Main Street to Fair Street and (2) on-street parking can be suspended on Fair Street and Northern Avenue on the north and westbound sides between Route 9D and Church Street if signs are placed at least 24 hours in advance.
- The board accepted a \$416,800 bid from Gallo Construction to remove and replace clarifier and filter media and recoat tanks at the water treatment plant. A \$400,000 bid was rejected because the company could not provide satisfactory references. Much of the funding will come from a federal grant.

AROUND THE REGION

Brewster

School District Investigates Residency

An annual audit identified 526 children who may not be legal residents of the school district.

According to *Mid Hudson News*, the school board was told that the children live in residences where the leases are expired or will expire in December. At least 48 students are enrolled at addresses where leases expired in 2023.

Superintendent Michelle Gosh said the numbers “ballooned” because the district

did not have a residency officer for four months following a resignation.

Sullivan County

Schools Want to Merge

Voters rejected an attempt in 2022 by the Livingston Manor and Roscoe school districts to merge, so officials will try again by circulating a petition to get the issue on a December ballot.

Livingston Manor has 383 students and Roscoe has 208. John Evans, the superintendent of both districts, said the merger would bring in state aid of \$30.7 million,

compared to \$7 million in 2022.

Putnam Valley

Legislators Seek Septic Funds

State Sen. Rob Rolison and Assembly Member Matt Slater have asked the state Department of Environmental Conservation to expand its Septic System Replacement Fund to include some parts of Putnam Valley.

The legislators said at a news conference that they are concerned about the number of systems failing and the expense of replacing them. They met with residents earlier this month.

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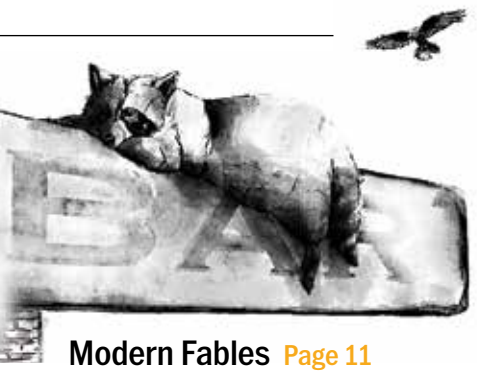
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The HIGHLANDS Current



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Comptroller Candidates Clash Over Spending

Beacon council member challenging Dutchess appointee

By Jeff Simms

The Dutchess County comptroller job is on the ballot in what has become a heated political battle.

The comptroller is the county's chief accounting officer and is responsible for auditing its departments and outside agencies funded by the county. Only eight counties in the state, including Dutchess, have elected comptrollers.

The position is open because Robin Lois,



Aymar-Blair



Pulver

a Democrat, resigned Dec. 30 to become the state's deputy comptroller for local government and school accountability. The race will determine who holds the position through Dec. 31, 2025, when her four-year term was set to end. It will again appear on

the November 2025 ballot.

The incumbent is Gregg Pulver, a Republican from Pine Plains, a town of about 2,300 people in northern Dutchess, who was named comptroller by then-County Executive William F.X. O'Neil to succeed Lois. Pulver served 10 years in the county Legislature, the last six as its chair, before losing his re-election bid two weeks before the appointment.

He is being challenged by Dan Aymar-Blair, a Democrat who is serving his third term representing Ward 4 on the Beacon City Council. Aymar-Blair began his career with Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley before moving into the public sector. He has worked for the New York City Department of

(Continued on Page 7)



Part 3: Modern Immigrants

Learning the Language

In a national survey conducted last month by Marist Poll for National Public Radio and PBS News, 44 percent of registered voters said immigration was a deciding factor in whom they support for president. Another 43 percent said it was an important factor. In this series, we examine what drew recent immigrants to the Highlands, the process they undergo to stay and the effect on local schools.

By Joey Asher

When Renata Saldaña was 17, she and her younger sister showed up at the Garrison School seeking to enroll. It was 2017 and they had just come from Ecuador, overstaying tourist visas and moving to their parents' Philipstown apartment.

As Renata recalls, it took a week to realize that they were at the wrong school, that Garrison only goes through eighth grade and that they needed to enroll a few miles up Route 9D at Haldane High School.

"We spoke no English," she said, adding that the schools sometimes relied on Spanish-speaking janitors to translate. "It was hard."

That year Renata and her sister were two of 11 English Language Learners (ELL) at Haldane and the only two enrolled at the high school. The district had one ELL teacher.

Seven years later, Haldane has 20 English Language Learners among its 800 students and has added a second ELL teacher, said Carl Albano, the district's interim superintendent.

What's happening at Haldane is happening at schools across the Hudson Valley.

(Continued on Page 17)



TRADING UP — The Desmond-Fish Public Library in Garrison held its annual Pumpkin Glow on Oct. 24, and the guests included Izod from Hudson Valley Paws for a Cause in a lion costume. Izod's human is Alissa Phillips of Yorktown Heights, who adopted him as a puppy after he developed allergies which disqualified him from being a guide dog. For more Halloween photos, see highlandscurrent.org. Photo by Ross Corsair

A New Home for Beacon Firefighters

State-of-the-art central station opens

By Jeff Simms

One minute ahead of schedule, at 7:59 a.m. on Monday (Oct. 28), firefighter Eric Jensen raised the U.S. flag above the new Beacon fire station at 1140 Wolcott Ave.

Dennis Lahey Sr., 91, a 64-year volunteer who was the fire chief for two stints in the 1970s, and Pat Kelliher, a volunteer who retired in March after 54 years of

service, held the flag as Jensen attached it to the pole. Ten firefighters and Chief Tom Lucchesi lined the sidewalk, saluting the flag beneath blue skies streaked with clouds.

Although a few punch-list items remain, firefighters moved into the \$14.7 million City of Beacon Fire Department this week, marking the completion of the city's largest-ever capital project. A ribbon-cutting is scheduled for 11 a.m. on Nov. 16.

"I'm really happy with how this came out," said Lucchesi, who was named chief in April 2023, two months before construction began.

(Continued on Page 16)

Philipstown to Pave Sections of Two Roads

Also, tentative 2025 budget raises tax rates

By Leonard Sparks

The Philipstown Town Board on Oct. 23 approved paving sections of Indian Brook and Lane Gate roads and began revising a draft 2025 budget that would stay within the state-mandated tax cap while lowering tax rates.

Supervisor John Van Tassel and Board Members Megan Cotter and Robert Flaherty approved an environmental impact review and resolution to pave a section of Indian Brook Road at the Route 9D underpass and Lane Gate Road between Eden Park and 115 Lane Gate.

Van Tassel said the Indian Brook section spans less than 1,000 feet and gets "completely washed out" from storms. He also said Lane Gate will remain untouched for now because it needs substantial drainage work before paving.

The labor and materials costs for maintaining dirt roads are "astronomical," said Van Tassel. On Avery Road, which has sections that are paved and unpaved, the town pays 15 cents per foot for the covered sections and \$10.78 per foot for the dirt portions, he said.

Indian Brook Road between Route 9D and Route 9 costs \$2.24 per foot. The town average is 68 cents for paved versus \$6.95 for unpaved, said Van Tassel.

Board Members Jason Angell and Judy Farrell did not arrive until after the vote, but

(Continued on Page 18)

Immigration (from Page 1)

In the Wappingers school district, the number of ELL students has tripled over the last 10 years to more than 330, although that's still a tiny percentage in a district with over 10,000 students, said Michelle Cardwell, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. She said the growth of the ELL population has not strained district resources. The Arlington, Brewster, Carmel, Poughkeepsie and Newburgh districts report similar increases.

Driving the growth are people fleeing economic hardship and political turmoil in Latin America, said Julie Sugarman, associate director for K-12 research at the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C.

At Haldane, 50 percent of the English language learners are Latino, according to state education data. In Beacon, it's about 80 percent Latino, in Wappingers, about 75 percent, and in Poughkeepsie and Brewster, about 95 percent.

Newburgh had 1,800 ELL students last year, up from 1,500 a decade ago. The district reported that most newcomers are from Honduras, Peru, Columbia, Venezuela, Guatemala and Haiti. In Wappingers, many are from Guatemala.

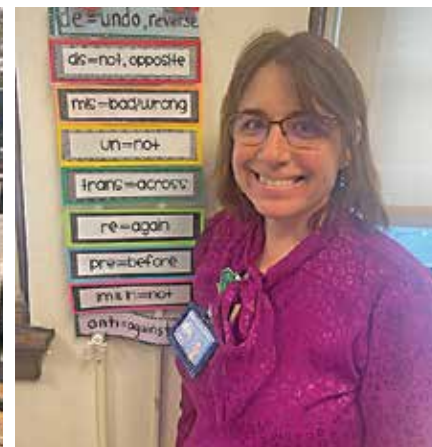
An exception to the ELL growth is the Beacon school district, where enrollment has remained consistent: 75 a decade ago and 70 today among the district's 2,400 students. The reason is the cost of living, said Sagrario Rudecindo-O'Neill, the assistant superintendent of curriculum and student support.



Sagrario Rudecindo-O'Neill



Renata Saldaña



Kathryn Lokmaci

"If you look at the rents here, you can't buy anything," she said. "We don't have hotels nearby or short-term rentals."

Kathryn Lokmaci, who teaches ELL at South Avenue Elementary School, recalled that several years ago some ELL students were forced out of their homes on Main Street to make way for condos and "had to relocate to other areas that were cheaper, like Newburgh or Poughkeepsie," she said. "That was sad."

How many ELL students are undocumented is unknown. Districts enroll students without regard to their legal status; the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1982 in *Plyler v. Doe* that public schools must accept undocumented immigrants.

That case was in the spotlight last year when some New York districts expressed concern about an influx of immigrants. In response, Attorney General Letitia James

and Betty Rosa, the state education commissioner, issued a joint letter "to remind school administrators that all children and youth in New York between the ages of 5 and 21 have the right to a free public-school education," regardless of status.

The influx has created a shortage of ELL teachers, prompting the Education Department to partner with local teaching programs and to build flexibility into the certification process. The department said that more than 1,400 people have enrolled in ELL teaching programs over the past decade.

In recent years, Wappingers added four ELL teachers and now has 12, said Cardwell. She noted that several districts in Dutchess County have partnered with SUNY New Paltz to get more teachers certified.

In addition to learning English, immigrant students face emotional challenges.

"I felt so ashamed," said one former Haldane ELL student. She recalled telling her parents: "I'm not happy here. I'm not understanding anything. I can't communicate with my friends. Coming to school is giving me anxiety. I can't do it anymore."

She said she was bullied for her lack of English. The student, who asked not to be identified because she is still undocumented, told her parents that she wanted to transfer to Peekskill, where there were more Latino students.

She credits Principal Julia Sniffen and her teachers with stopping the bullying, making her feel welcome and persuading her parents to stick with Haldane.

ELL students also experience culture shock. A Newburgh student from Ecuador reported that she didn't understand why students didn't wear uniforms and was appalled when she saw students attending school in what looked like pajamas.

While the influx of immigrants has created resource challenges for larger districts in New York City, Chicago and Denver, schools in the Highlands appear to have embraced the diversity.

Beacon's district newsletter, the *Bulldog Bulletin*, featured a story this summer about a project in Lokmaci's class at South Avenue called Bilingualism is My Superpower.

"It's scary when you come to another country, and you might be isolated from your culture," Lokmaci said. "I want them to know that it is cool that they know two languages."

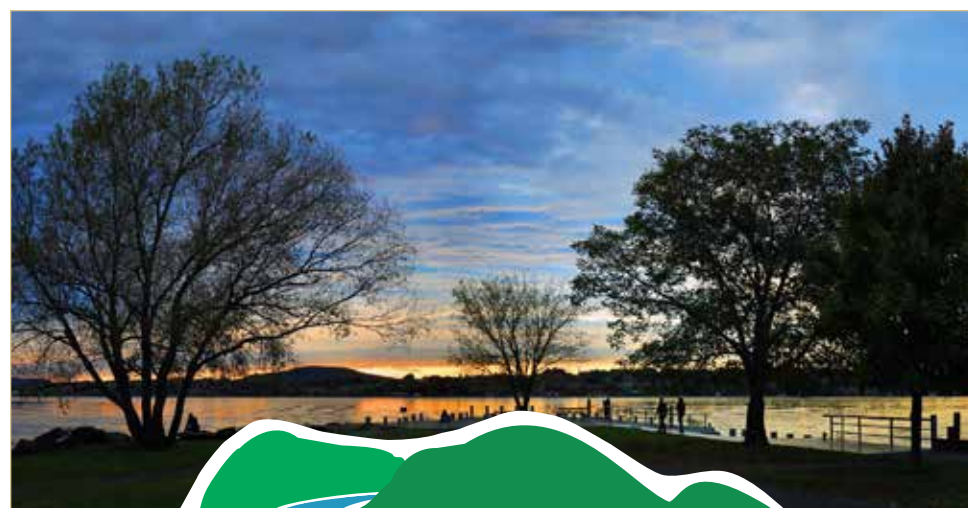
Haldane also has embraced cultural differences, said Albano: "It brings a lot of value to the school."

When she graduated in 2019, Renata Saldaña was the first Haldane graduate to be awarded a Seal of Biliteracy by the state, said Sniffen, who noted that by 2024 a third of the graduating class earned the honor.

Barbara Jennings, who has taught ELL at Haldane since 2010, said the approach has evolved. Teachers once urged students' parents to speak only English at home, believing that immersion helped children become fluent more quickly. Now, she said, students are encouraged to retain their native language and culture.

Nevertheless, Jennings said some students shy away from their native language. "They're embarrassed because it makes them different," she said. "I try to share with them how important it is to have their identity, to share their culture and to share their heritage."

For the first two parts of this series, see highlandscurrent.org.



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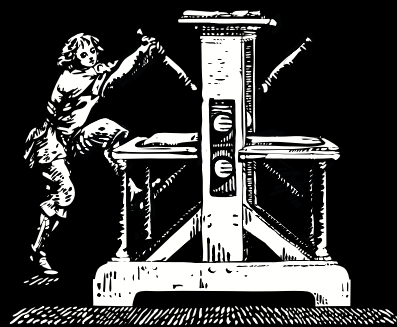
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