

Get off the pot

By JOE SACK 2/25/11
RYE CITY COUNCILMAN

As I learned by reading the last issue of *The Sound Shore Review*, the Hen Island media circus seems to be back, with Ray Tartaglione serving again as ringmaster [*"The honeymoon is over," Feb. 18 edition*].

The most recent incarnation of the campaign will allegedly include a billboard with the faces of Rye City Council members superimposed on people sitting on a toilet. I have apparently been spared this attempt at public embarrassment. But as a keen observer of our meetings, Ray must have guessed that I would condemn this tactic regardless.

Ray has correctly identified me as someone who is open to a fulsome discussion of the issues. Not just on Hen Island, but on any matter. But that doesn't mean that in the end I will or won't agree with the position Ray is advocating. And I certainly do not agree with calling out volunteer public officials in such a personal way, and in a way designed more to be hurtful than to achieve true progress.

The "Mr. Floatie" mascot was one thing. And in a twisted way, before it was way overdone, it was mildly humorous and effective in making otherwise disinterested people notice him. But attacking individual members of the community is quite another thing.

My current colleagues and I are not professional politicians. I'd say that we don't deserve this, but to quote that Clint Eastwood line from "Unforgiven" – "Deserve's got nothing to do with it." Anyway, we are all big boys and girls on the council, and after a while you can't help but develop a thick skin in this job.

However, I am troubled that anyone would feel so dispossessed that they need to resort to outrageous methods in order to be heard and have their positions considered. And in some cases, maybe we can do better at giving people a venue to air out their grievances.

But most importantly, we must do a better job at giving petitioners a final, honest and reasoned outcome – whether or not they agree with the outcome – rather than let an issue fester.

I am calling on Ray to end his latest campaign before it even starts. I haven't seen the heralded billboard yet, and I hope I never do. As a studied ringmaster, Ray is obviously building up the anticipation before unveiling the sign to achieve even more notoriety and perhaps cause even more *agita*. But it's never too late to reverse course and make amends, on both sides.

Ray has watched us closely for years now, and I have watched him, but I don't know for sure what Ray's reaction to this column will be. Maybe my position will earn me a spot on the billboard with my colleagues. So be it. Maybe Ray will cherry pick some of my comments to show that I support him. Not that simple. But maybe Ray will come to an epiphany and realize that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Let's be hopeful. If Ray drops the billboard campaign it will be a unilateral move. It will not be a bargaining chip or *quid pro quo*. That is, Ray removes the uncomfortable billboard, and the city gives him what he wants. It doesn't work that way. But in the end, I think Ray will find that the process produces better results for everyone when everyone acts with integrity and respect. Fair play is a sign of strength, not weakness.

But even if Ray does not desist from this bit of bad manners, I have full confidence that my fellow council members and I will not respond in kind. Despite the billboard, we will maintain our poise, and do what is right no matter what. And that's the real message that should be advertised.