

AMITYVILLE

Health care for ex-staff may end

■ **Move could save \$100G a year, mayor says**

■ **Former trustee Slack says he'll sue for benefits**

BY NICHOLAS SPANGLER
nicholas.spangler@newsday.com

Amityville Mayor James Wandell says the village will likely move ahead with plans to cancel health benefits in the next budget year for some former officials.

In an email to village residents last Friday, Wandell described the move as a necessary response to the "fiscal disaster" brought on by police salaries and construction costs associated with a new Village Hall built in 2009.

The email puts the average police salary at \$164,000 last year and the cost of work done at Village Hall at \$12 million. Salaries for non-union village employees are currently frozen, and Wandell, Deputy Mayor Jessica Bernius and trustee Nick LaLota have asked the police union to make pay concessions.

One former trustee who receives the benefits said he will sue the village to prevent cuts.

"They'll get sued and they'll lose," said Joseph Slack, 82, who served 15 years on the Village Board.

Wandell's email blames the administration of former mayor Peter Imbert for Amityville's finances, a claim he and LaLota have made before. Imbert, who was traveling and not available for comment, has in the past defended the police contract and Village Hall construction as necessary long-term investments.

Cutting the benefits for former part-time officials

will save the village about \$100,000 a year, Wandell writes, making it easier to keep property tax increases within the state-imposed cap as trustees look to close a \$958,000 deficit in the \$16.2 million spending plan for next year.

Besides Slack, former officials who could be affected under the cuts include: trustees Edward Johnson and Peter Casserly, Mayor Emil Pavlik, Carol Ketcham, the secretary to the village assessor, and village attorney Stephen Kretz. Casserly and Ketcham did not comment, and Johnson and Kretz could not be reached yesterday.

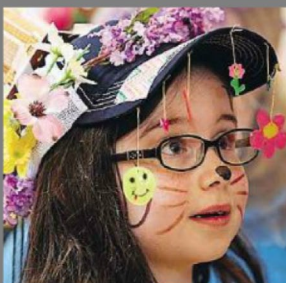
"To have them turn on me and do something like this, I was totally shocked," said Pavlik, 79. "I have a heart condition — where am I going to get insurance?"

According to Wandell's email, "The overwhelming majority" of them have access to Medicare, and all would have an "extended period" to find alternate coverage.

Complicating the picture is research by village attorney Richard Handler suggesting that a 1983 Village Board resolution may limit officials' eligibility.

Municipal efforts to abolish benefits for former employees have generally withstood court challenge, said Handler. The Village of Greenport, for example, successfully defended a suit by a former mayor over rescinded benefits in 2009.

Current trustee Dennis Siry suggested at a recent budget work session he might oppose the cut as unfair. Wandell, LaLota and Deputy Mayor Jessica Bernius have signaled their support. Trustee Kevin Smith did not voice an opinion on the matter at the meeting.



Rabbit out of a hat

Magician James Amore, right, performs a magic trick for Oscar Romero, 6, of Sound Beach, at the Spring Happening in Centereach yesterday. Above, Claire Wagner, 7, of Sound Beach, left, and Gabrielle Castaldo, 4, of Port Jefferson Station, took part in face painting activities and the spring hat contest. ■ **LI top photos: newsday.com/topphotos**



BARRY SCAN

ROSLYN

Firm hired to oversee country club renovation

BY LISA IRIZARRY
lisa.irizarry@newsday.com

North Hempstead officials have hired Cameron Engineering & Associates for design, bidding and engineering work and construction management of tennis courts for the proposed \$14.2 million Roslyn Country Club renovation project.

The town board voted 7-0 on March 31 to approve a \$789,000 contract with the Woodbury firm.

Councilman Peter Zuckerman called the contract another step toward rebuilding the closed country club. But construction can't start until the town buys the property. And the purchase can't proceed until lawsuits filed by Roslyn Country Club residents are settled.

"We cannot move forward with any construction until we take title, but we have asked

the engineers to prepare the bid document for the tennis courts so that we will be ready to go as soon as we own the property," Town Supervisor Judi Bosworth said.

The country club, built in the 1950s, closed in 2007 after Corona Realty Holdings owner Manochehr Malekan sued community residents in an attempt to scuttle easement rights from 1959. The easements gave residents access to the pool and tennis courts for a \$100 annual fee.

After the court ruled in favor of the residents, Malekan closed the country club. About 400 residents of the country club neighborhood then sued Malekan and Corona Realty Holdings, arguing that the club's closure violated their rights, including the easements. Actions against Malekan have been dismissed but not those against the company.

Todd Zarin, president of the Roslyn Country Club Civic Association, said all but two residents appear ready to drop their lawsuits to regain access.

The town plans to purchase a 7.2-acre portion of the roughly 10-acre property to create a special park district. In addition to the tennis courts, a new main pool, club house, decking, food court, basketball court and playground would be built. Construction is expected to begin this year if the town is able to purchase the land, with completion targeted for 2017.

Mineola-based Corona Realty Holdings LLC would continue to own the remaining property that includes a catering facility.

North Hempstead plans to purchase the 7.2 acres with \$2 million from its general fund, and the renovations would be paid for with a \$12.2 million bond.