

Colts News Network tackles election story live

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When the polls closed on April 27, students from Kinnelon High School (KHS) were hot on the story, with the Colts News Network broadcasting the school election results live from the school.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOE SARNO

Karen Anselmo, center foreground, counts down to show time at the Colts TV Network, which broadcast school board election results live from its Kinnelon High School studio Wednesday night. In the background from left are Jessica Daniels, Vanessa Davis, Rachel Pileggi, Dr. Allen Kirk, school board president, and James Opiekun, superintendent of schools.

Roberta Loniewski, who teaches TV/Video Production courses at KHS, said the show drew rave reviews when it aired on April 27 at 9:30 p.m. on Cablevision 77. Though maybe a handful of students could be seen in front of the camera, Loniewski said the production required the hard work of many students.

The show interspersed taped interviews with residents after they exited the polls at Kinnelon Public Library, Kinnelon Borough Hall and the Fayson Lakes Clubhouse with live interviews with School Board President Dr. Allen Kirk, Mayor Robert Collins, Superintendent of Schools James

Opiekun, and school board member elect Marianne DeAlessi.

The students not only informed residents that the \$35.2 million budget was passed by a vote of 1,051 to 794, they also were the first to announce to the public that Denise Hatch was the successful write-in candidate for a three-year seat that no one had filed for on the ballot.

DeAlessi ran uncontested for a three-year term. Dr. Marcy Pryor, who was slated to attend the broadcast but had to bow out because of an illness, ran uncontested for a two-year unexpired term. DeAlessi received 1,167 votes; Pryor, 1,090; and Hatch, 308.

Kirk and Opiekun praised Colts News Network for its initiative in presenting the election night coverage and expressed gratitude to the voters for supporting the budget. They also noted that the budget will help advance the goals of the district.

The Colts news team polled the public on three questions. Those polled were asked if parents supported school choice for their children. While some interpreted the question to mean tax dollars funding schools other than public schools such as charter schools, others interpreted it to mean parents spending their own money (aside from property taxes) to fund their children's education at non-public schools.

In a second question, parents were asked how New Jersey schools stacked up nationally and a third question asked voters whether districts should consider eliminating high school and elementary school electives and programs such as art, music and technology in light of recent budget defeats.

Although some students wanted to ask questions specific to Kinnelon, Loniewski said the decision

was made to make the questions broad based and applicable to all school districts.

"This was very involved. Kids had to come back and edit the footage from the interviews outside the polls. We had guests on and off the broadcast. We had high angle shots and breaks to public service announcements. Everyone in front of the camera and in back of the camera had to keep on their toes," said Loniewski. "It was great for the kids. They were thrilled after the show. They were so up."

When interviewed by KHS' Colts Network news crew, DeAlessi spoke of the district's achievements in academics, arts and athletics. Noting that KHS was ranked 21st among the state's high schools by NJ Monthly, DeAlessi said she would like to see the district climb the ladder even further. She mentioned an interest in bolstering math and science programs.

"We have a very good school system and I want to be part of the decision-making process," she said.

DeAlessi is a 10-year resident of the borough. She is a member of the Kinnelon High School Home & School Association. She has served as a class mom and has helped run the military bridge fund-raiser at Pearl R. Miller School. She is a member of the Morris County School Nurses' Association.

DeAlessi received a bachelor's degree in biology from Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia and a bachelor's degree in nursing from Rutgers University. She earned her nursing certification from William Paterson University and her master's degree in public administration from Seton Hall University. She is employed by St. Clare's Hospital, where she is a manager in nursing administration.

Hatch, who has been a Kinnelon resident since 1993, said she considered filing for a seat but she knew DeAlessi and Pryor were filing and thought one of the incumbents was filing.

"When I realized there was an open seat and no one was running, I felt I needed to step up and have a voice," said Hatch.

Hatch is a former co-president of the Kinnelon Elementary Home & School Association. When the school budget failed during one of her two years at the co-presidency, she began to routinely attend school board meetings.

"Although the schools survived the budget defeat last year pretty well, I saw a decided difference at our schools," said Hatch. "Education is key to a town. If the educational system does not remain strong, then Kinnelon will not have much to offer."

Hatch is originally from Kenmore, N.Y., a suburb of Buffalo. She graduated from Canisus College in Buffalo with a bachelor's degree in business. She moved to New Jersey to accept a position at Picatinny Arsenal. She and her husband, Chris, have a son and daughter in eighth grade and a son in fourth grade. She is active in Our Lady of the Magnificat parish where she has taught religious instruction to second graders for six years and is part of the Pre-Cana team.

Pryor, who was forced to miss the live TV show because of illness, is an eight-year Kinnelon resident, who feels her extensive knowledge and experience in education would be an asset to the board.

"I am honored to be a member of the Kinnelon school board and looking forward to working with the entire team," said Pryor on Thursday. "I feel the community came together and passed the budget; I couldn't be happier and am extremely grateful."

A founding member of Kinnelon CEP (Community and Education Partnership), which is a liaison group between the community and the school board, Pryor has been a public school educator for 18 years in addition to serving as a college adjunct. She has a doctorate in administration in special education from Columbia University where she was a research fellow. Pryor has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, elementary education, and special education. She also has two master's degrees – one in instructional technology and another in supervision.

She and her husband, Marc, have two sons. Their oldest son is in first grade at Kiel School and their youngest son will be entering Kinnelon kindergarten in the fall.

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