

MAYOR'S COLUMN

I noticed that my recent columns discussing life at Village Hall have been a bit doom and gloom reflecting the current economic downturn and our legal and budgetary concerns. But there is a humorous side of life at 200 Pondfield Road that is worth sharing.

Starting from almost my first day as Mayor, the staff and I have shared smiles and laughter which thankfully is part and parcel of working at Village Hall.

As an illustration, during my first month as Mayor, I was asked to perform a wedding. I was incredulous that I could legally marry anyone so I was quite nervous to get it right. With the crowd fully assembled, I decided to share that like the bride and groom, this too, was my first marriage. Then I graciously proceeded to wish us both many, many more. You should have seen the bride's mother's faces!

Performing a wedding is a very happy break from general day-to-day activities and they cannot only lift the spirit but reap unexpected dividends. I was standing on the long line outside of Roberto's Restaurant on Arthur Avenue with some very distinguished Westchester colleagues when we were whisked off the line and directed to a prime table. I just assumed my associates had some influence. Turns out I had officiated at one of the waiter's wedding several years back and he remembered me.

Second only to weddings in my enjoyment of the job is the annual visit of the very astute Bronxville School third graders. If they are any indication, we are in good hands for the future.

One year, while showing them the photo gallery of Mayors of early Bronxville, which happens to be all gentlemen, a young girl very seriously said "This must have been before women had the right to vote."

Last year, when I proudly introduced our new police chief, Chief Satriale, as the youngest chief in Westchester County, the students were duly impressed. Immediately following the introduction, I noticed one boy staring very intently at me. After a few moments, he declared rather matter of factly that I was probably not the youngest Mayor. I concurred and made a mental note to buy wrinkle cream.

On another occasion, while I was explaining the history of our Village, a young fellow seemed so interested and bobbed his hand up and down throughout the talk. I could not wait for his question as I thought I had really hit the mark and captivated someone. Calling on him first, his urgent question was, "What is your dog's name?"

Our front desk and main phone also receive requests/questions that can't help but elicit a chuckle. Inquiries include "where should I have a three year olds birthday party?", "What is currently playing at the movie theater?" – including current show times and directions to Kraft Avenue, and, "Will I get a ticket if I park in a 30 minute meter and need more than 30 minutes?" (We all know the answer to that.....)

My most famous faux pas also involved parking. Just after the Village began leasing the Avalon lot for commuter parking, we noticed cars parking for free 24/7 while we did repairs in anticipation of Village use. The nearby neighbors who pay monthly to park in less convenient locations were justifiably annoyed at these freeloaders. We had been trying gentle persuasion by posting signs and leaving warnings before resorting to the more Draconian step of towing.

Unbeknownst to me, because our paths did not cross that morning, our Village Administrator, Mr. Porr, had a great idea. In his role as President of the New York State Association of Managers, he had planned an event at the Federal Reserve. In an effort to conserve gas, he instructed his colleagues to park in the Avalon lot and to take the train to Manhattan.

Well when I arrived at work, I received word that the parking problem was worse than ever at the lot so I decided that is it, start towing. Cut to the Federal Reserve where one of the managers receives word via Lo-Jack that his car is on the move. What followed was an Abbott and Costello moment as we frantically called the tow company to return the cars we had just instructed them to remove. Unless he reads this column, one gent will never know that his car had gotten a tour of Yonkers while he was in the City. Bronxville's seriousness about parking was already known to the Managers' Association, but thanks to this episode, it is now legend.

Needless to say, the parking office provides the most fodder for stories but given the sheer volume of material, I will save it for a post retirement book!

However, based on the quantity of tickets they pay, many of the students at the High School think a brick at Village Hall should be inscribed with their name similar to the School's Foundation walk. Their reasoning being that they played no small part in financing the Village Hall renovations. They have a point.

Finally, possibly the funniest moment came via phone call when I was Mayor less than a month. An unidentified woman greeted my hello with "Hello nature lover". Knowing conservation is in vogue, I thought this could be okay despite it being said with some derision. She then proceeded to share her analysis that the increase in the Village raccoon population directly correlated with my taking office. She was certain I was luring them here somehow. I assured her that was not the case but I made the fatal mistake of sharing this story with my family. Needless to say, they still get a great deal of mileage out of it at my expense.

So in spite of economic downturns, legal challenges, and snow and ice storms that seem to never end, humor has a place at Village Hall proving once again that laughter is the best medicine.