

District pitches 71 layoffs

Eastport-S. Manor schools address budget straits

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND
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Eastport-South Manor school officials have proposed 71 staff cuts during the 2018-19 academic year to close what they describe as a looming budget deficit that threatens the district's financial stability.

The potential layoffs, which would include dozens of teachers, were outlined at a Wednesday board meeting in the district's high school, attended by hundreds of anxious residents.

The sprawling district, which straddles the border of Brookhaven and Southampton towns, employs about 500 workers and enrolls about 3,400 students.

School administrators said Eastport-South Manor's fiscal woes have been building for years, as staff levels continued to climb even as enrollments fell. In addition, they said, the district has repeatedly dug into cash reserves in order to curb growth in taxes.

"The district has been living beyond its budget for a number of years," said Superintendent Patrick Brimstein, who was brought in last May with the specific aim of righting the system's finances.

Brimstein and his assistant superintendent for business, Tim Laube, who also is new to the district, have laid out a series of potential cuts in student programs and services, as well as the possible closing of one of the district's four elementary schools by 2021. For the 2018-19 school year, the administration is proposing a \$93,378,095 budget, which represents a 0.49 percent spending increase.

In January, Eastport-South Manor was identified by the



Superintendent Patrick Brimstein

state comptroller's office as among 26 districts statewide that were facing various degrees of fiscal stress. A drop in cash reserves prompted Standard & Poor's to downgrade the district's credit rating from AA+ to AA-, local officials said.

Linda Wygonik, president of Eastport-South Manor's 280-member teacher union, said the organization was prepared to work together with the district's board and administration to find financial solutions.

At the same time, Wygonik expressed concern that cuts might result in losses of advanced high school courses, as well as in larger-size elementary classes.

"Obviously, we have grave concerns about the education of our students," said Wygonik, who has taught special-education classes locally for 25 years.

The union's current contract expires June 30.

Eastport-South Manor held two public forums in February and March to outline the district's fiscal problems, prompting many residents to praise the new administration for its candid approach.

"I think they're doing their best," said Marion Diener of Manorville, a former district board member who plans to stand for election again in May. Diener voiced sympathy for teachers who face possible job losses but said the district has to take action to balance its books.



Crusty grab

A seagull finds a crab at the boat basin while feeding at Robert Moses State Park Thursday.

SUFFOLK CHOOSES NEW VENDOR FOR BEACHES

BY RICK BRAND
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Live rock music, cocktails and Hawaiian night will continue at Suffolk beaches this summer after parks officials chose J&B Restaurant Partners in an \$8.9 million deal to replace Beach Hut after the popular former concessionaire pleaded guilty to shortchanging the county.

Suffolk parks trustees unanimously chose the Holbrook-based restaurant firm over eight other contenders to run food concessions at Smith Point, Suffolk's prime oceanfront park, as well as Cupsogue and Meschutt beaches in a 10-year deal, with two five-year options.

J&B Restaurant Partners Top Flight Foods LLC operates all the TGI Friday's and Friendly's restaurants in Nassau and Suffolk, as well as concessions, band shell and shops at Jones Beach.

In their presentation, J&B officials promised to schedule local bands nightly through the summer, and theme nights, including barbecues, lobsterfests, Hawaiian and Caribbean nights. "We are very confident in our ability

to take over these venues and provide the best entertainment possible," company officials said in their Power Point presentation.

Foods will range from appetizers such as Buffalo wings to baked clams, grilled chicken, fish, salads, pasta, sandwiches, hot dogs and desserts.

Don McKay, deputy parks commissioner, said the selection was made "after a careful and intense investigation," that resulted in a "very fair process." The county still has to negotiate a contract based on the J&B proposal, and get permits from the county health department and State Liquor Authority for the new concessions to be in place by Memorial Day.

According to ratings by a five-member review committee, park officials say J&B scored 99 percent at Smith Point, 98 at Meschutt and 94 at Cupsogue. The nearest competitor, Island Time Hospitality, scored 83 at Smith Point; Ian Duke scored 86 percent at Meschutt and Strano Enterprises 84 at Cupsogue.

J&B called for paying an annual licensing fee of \$50,000 at

Smith Point, and \$30,000 at each of Meschutt and Cupsogue. In addition, for all gross sales over \$100,000 at each location, the firm will pay the county 17.5 percent at Smith Point, 15 percent at Meschutt and 12 percent at Cupsogue.

J&B also proposed spending \$957,000 in capital improvements, including tiki bar, new bandstand and volleyball courts, and an optional \$250,000 rooftop deck at Meschutt to view sunsets if the county can make the contract 20 years upfront.

The county terminated Beach Hut, which had been the concessionaire for nearly two decades, after the business and owner Fred Marsillio pleaded guilty in December in state Supreme Court in Suffolk to shortchanging the county and Babylon Town on sales tax and fees, resulting in fines, restitution and interest totaling \$1.14 million.

Suffolk Comptroller John Kennedy, whose office uncovered Beach Hut's wrongdoing, began a performance audit which park officials fought, claiming procurement is an administrative function. That issue is still in court.