

# FOR DISTRICT PROJECTS



JOHNNY MILANO

**Nassau provided \$22,000 for the statue of Brig. Gen. George A. Jones, an African-American U.S. Army veteran, in Roosevelt.**

thermal imaging cameras for the Bellmore Fire District, Taser guns for the Village of Freeport and a fire and rescue boat for the Village of Bayville.

## Uneven distribution

Earmarks have varied widely across Nassau's 19 legislative districts, with some communities emerging as bigger winners than others, records show.

The legislature approved the most funding — \$2,073,999 from 2013 through 2018 — for the 19th Legislative District, which is represented by Legis. Steve Rhoads. Before him, Democratic Legis. David Denenberg, of Merrick, represented the district, which covers South Shore Nassau communities, such as Seaford, Bellmore, and Wantagh.

The smallest total amount, \$220,000 during that period, went to the 8th Legislative District, represented by Legis. Vincent Muscarella (R-West Hempstead), which stretches from Bellerose Terrace to West Hempstead.

Newsday's analysis found that many earmarks went to school districts, including:

- The Massapequa school district, which got \$500,000 for sports lighting at Berner Field.
  - The Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District, \$250,000 for turf fields.
  - Northern Parkway Elementary School, nearly \$50,000 for a wellness track.
  - The Seaford school district, \$25,000 for a high school scoreboard.
  - The Lynbrook school district, \$8,870 for wrestling mats.
- Other member items provided:
- \$71,000 for work, including renovation of the area around a statue of a horse tamer and his steed at Gerry Pond Park in Roslyn, and \$75,000 to repair its twin sculpture that once was outside Roslyn High School.
  - \$100,000 for a "comfort station" at North Hempstead Town's Manhasset Valley Park.
  - \$24,000 for a scientific study on beach closures in the Village of Laurel Hollow.
  - \$50,000 for bathroom renovations at Westbury Memorial Public Library.
  - \$22,000 to build a statue in Roosevelt of Brig. Gen. George

## Suffolk, NYS, Congress try to limit spending

BY SCOTT EIDLER

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As Nassau continues to earmark small amounts of funding for projects in individual county legislators' districts, New York State, Suffolk County and Congress all have taken steps to try to rein in such spending.

In New York, the traditional state member item program, the Community Projects Fund, has authorized no new appropriations since Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo took office in 2011, said Morris Peters, a spokesman for the state budget division.

Since then, the state has approved local development projects through the 10 Regional Economic Development Councils, which are public-private partnerships, following a competitive screening process, Peters said.

The Long Island council has delivered \$639.1 million for 791 projects. The council also issues reports about the status of individual projects, disclosing whether projects were completed, terminated, are "moving slowly" or have "potential problems."

Also, the State Legislature or executive branch can nominate capital projects under the State and Municipal Pro-

gram, according to the governor's office.

Suffolk officially eliminated its member item program in the 2012 budget, a county spokesman said. The legislature traditionally had \$630,000 — or \$35,000 for each of the 18 county legislators — to award to various groups, from sports leagues to soup kitchens.

"Because of the budget constraints at the time, we had decided to eliminate those funds," said Legis. DuWayne Gregory (D-Copague), the chamber's presiding officer. "It hurt a lot of groups, or at least some, because they almost became very reliant on the funding. We try to tell groups this is not funding you should be relying on."

Suffolk can still distribute \$500,000 annually through its Downtown Revitalization Program. A committee, with members appointed by county legislators, scores and ranks projects based on worthiness.

In 2018, the county received 18 applications for grants, 11 of which were funded. Winners included chambers of commerce, taxing jurisdictions and other groups that applied to spruce up their downtowns with decorative crosswalks, pedes-

trian paths, parking lot redesigns and sidewalks and lights.

Perhaps the best known earmark of all time was dubbed the "bridge to nowhere" — a moniker for a \$223 million project to connect Ketchikan, Alaska, to an airport at Gravina Island, Alaska, which has a population of 50 people.

The project became an issue during the 2008 presidential campaign when Sarah Palin, the Republican nominee for vice president, said that as Alaska governor, she had "told the Congress, thanks, but no thanks on that Bridge to Nowhere."

However, Palin chose to use the \$200 million Congress originally had set aside for the bridge for other transportation projects, The Washington Post wrote.

In 2011, congressional leaders called for a moratorium on earmarking funds for small, local projects in the federal budget.

But earmarks have proved tenacious. Citizens Against Government Waste, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit that tracks federal spending on member items, reported that spending on earmarks in 2018 totaled \$14.7 billion, up from \$6.8 billion the year before.

A. Jones, a trailblazing African-American veteran of the U.S. Army, National Guard and New York City Fire Department.

## Working with municipalities

Many of the projects require the county legislature to approve agreements with other municipalities. Projects generally are funded by the municipality overseeing the work, and Nassau reimburses the local agency after the project is finished.

In other cases, the county performs the work with its own employees or vendors.

County earmarks can help municipalities and school districts fast track projects that otherwise would have been funded incrementally over many years, officials said.

"The real advantage for us is the ability to accelerate some projects that were already on the drawing board," said Carle Place school district Superintendent

David Flatley, whose district got \$65,000 in CRP money to renovate a weight room.

"That's a project that would eventually be on our list of projects to complete, and these dollars allowed us to complete that all at once, . . . as opposed to putting a couple of the dollars into them each year," Flatley said.

In 2014, Jericho school officials were looking to install

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