

TOWN COUNCILMAN HIRED AT NASSAU ELECTIONS BOARD

Town supervisor:
Refuse the job
or quit the board

BY STEFANIE DAZIO
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Hempstead Town Councilman Anthony D'Esposito said he has been hired at the Nassau County Board of Elections as a \$100,000 administrative assistant whose focus will draw on his experience as an NYPD detective to deal with polling place security and elections cybersecurity.

D'Esposito, a Republican from Island Park, began working at the elections board on Monday, he said Tuesday. He said he will be a "90 percent" employee so he can take time off for town board meetings.

There is no law preventing elected officials from working at a municipal board office — even in a role where they could count ballots for their own election, according to State Board of Elections spokesman John Conklin. The state board has no say in the hiring decisions of local boards of elections.

The hire is not without precedent; three former Oyster Bay GOP town board members held the dual positions during their terms.

Hempstead Town Supervisor Laura Gillen, a Democrat, called for D'Esposito to refuse his new job or resign from the town board.

"It is wholly unethical and a clear conflict of interest for Councilman D'Esposito to continue serving in his elected capacity while he accepts a plum, six-figure patronage job from his political party," Gillen said in a statement. "America's largest township deserves and requires more than '10 percent"

of the councilman's time."

Democrats on the elections board have "serious concerns" about D'Esposito's job and plan to raise the issue with Republican leadership, according to a source familiar with the issue. Democrats do not plan to hire someone with D'Esposito's same job description for their side.

D'Esposito said there is "no conflict of interest" between his two positions and promised to recuse himself from town votes concerning the elections board. He will receive a county pension but not health benefits.

"Residents whom I represent on the town board can expect the same level of dedication and service from me that I have always brought to the job," he said in a statement.

D'Esposito, who won his bid for re-election in November for a four-year term, has been on unpaid leave from his job as an NYPD detective since

his appointment to the town board in 2016. He said he will retire from the NYPD and plans to defer collecting his police pension. His town board salary is \$71,000.

D'Esposito said his duties will include researching polling place security in the wake of increased school shootings and working with school districts that host polling places to make them safer.

"The viability of our electoral process, as well as the sanctity of voting data, demands vigilance and competence in the areas of public safety, cybersecurity and investigations now more than ever before," he said in a statement.

D'Esposito and three other hires — including ex-Hempstead Town Supervisor Anthony Santino — added \$540,000 in new salaries for the elections board since December.

With Robert Brodsky and Celeste Hadrick



Honoring a life at roots of research

BY LAURA BLASEY
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When Kevin Thorbourne began to organize a Black History Month event for his community, he came across a name he'd never heard before: Henrietta Lacks.

What started as a handful of Google searches evolved into a learning experience and a new friendship between two families. In early February, Thorbourne and his 8-year-old daughter Jocelyn traveled to Maryland to meet and interview Lacks' grandson, Alfred Lacks-Carter. Jocelyn shared a video of the interview Tuesday with her third-grade class at Jefferson Elementary School in Huntington.

Lacks, who died in 1951, is the source of the world's most prolific human cell line, a liv-

ing collection of lab-harvested cells used in medical research.

"I'd really never heard of her before," said Thorbourne, 48, who is director of minority affairs for the Town of Huntington. "But every night, for two weeks, I was learning about her."

Lacks, a poor black woman, entered Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1951 for treatment of cervical cancer. She didn't survive, but the cells doctors took from her — without her consent — did.

The cells reproduced indefinitely in a lab environment — the first human cells to do so — and they continue to multiply to this day, making the culture an "immortal" source of material for researchers.

Known as HeLa cells, they have been used in breakthroughs from the develop-

ment of the polio vaccine to cancer research. The Lacks family didn't find out about the cells for more than 20 years and has fought for recognition of Lacks since. Lacks' story was the subject of a best-selling book in 2010 and a 2017 movie starring Oprah Winfrey.

With help from Jocelyn's teacher Toby Frye, Jocelyn and her dad set off for Maryland with a stack of questions from her classmates about Lacks' life.

"It was really cool because I knew they didn't know about Henrietta," Jocelyn said.

A beaming Jocelyn peppered Lacks-Carter with questions about Lacks' life while her father and grandfather recorded the interview.

Lacks-Carter said Tuesday he doesn't often get the chance to share his family's