

To Help Fund Conservation Initiative, LGA Appeals to Generosity of Residents

By Buzz Lamb

Victor Hershaft, chairman of the Lake George Association (LGA) West Brook committee, recently bought lunch for an eclectic group of people who love Lake George. In reality, the free lunch came with a price tag. Hershaft wanted to pick their brains.

Walt Lender, LGA Executive Director explained to the dozen or so luncheon guests that although a number of grants have been linked to the West Brook Initiative, the influx of dollars needed to pay off the note to purchase the old

Gaslight Village property is slow in coming. Lender explained that the majority of the grant money received to date is earmarked for the construction portion of the project.

According to Hershaft, the LGA is one of three local environmental groups which have joined together to purchase the conservation easement which will govern the use of the sensitive area. "Things are moving along, but not at a comfortable pace. I wanted to bring these people together to get their input on how we can move forward in a more positive manner," he said.

Lender said the grants received

thus far all require a local match. "What they (the grants) do is insure that the project will happen. What they don't do is help the environmental groups actually pay for the conservation easement," he said. "It's fantastic to have that money in the pipeline for future use, but our immediate need is to pay off the financing of the purchase of the property. To date we have raised approximately \$500,000 toward the acquisition cost." Lender added that the loan is due in March, 2010, emphasizing the fact that only nine months are remaining in which to raise approximately \$1.6 million. "The fire is at our feet," he said.

Hershaft said the three local environmental groups have formed a Capital Campaign Committee designed to focus exclusively on raising the \$2.1 million for the purchase of the easement. "We want to know if our collective campaign is having an impact on the community. We have a DVD done about West Brook. We have brochures available. We have done mailings. What else can we do to get the public interested in becoming part of the solution to our financial needs," he said.

Lender said the issue concerning the retention of two buildings on the 12 acre site has been somewhat of a hindrance to the fund-raising aspect of the project. "The public perception is that the three environmental organizations don't have the support of the three municipalities. Granted, there are a couple of elect-

ed officials who are really adamant about what to do with those buildings, but in reality, everyone is fine with the environmental program. The perception is that we are not all on the same page, but the fact is that we are," he said.

Lender went on to say that initiative to purchase the Gaslight Village property "has always been about the lake. We need to get the word out there that whether the buildings stay or go, it doesn't really affect our ability to manage stormwater."

According to Lender, 50 percent of the pollutants that enter the lake in the southern basin come from West Brook. With the new plan stormwater will collect in settling ponds and flow into engineered wetlands before entering Lak-

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George. Engineers estimate that 90 percent of all sediments will remain behind.

"The West Brook Conservation Initiative is the single most important effort ever undertaken to preserve Lake George," Hershaft said. "Every single drop of water that enters the lake through West Brook eventually makes the 32-mile journey. This project will eliminate a great threat to the lake and to everyone who loves Lake George. I am passionate about Lake George. In spite of the difficulties with the economy, the time is now for others to share that passion and to contribute financially to the success of this plan. The threat to the lake and the way we enjoy it is genuine. Everyone around the lake and all those who care for the lake ought to have a stake in this project," Hershaft said.