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Comments on the Village Trustees Letter

(Comments on page 35)

They state the Village was prepared for last winter by purchasing an additional used plow truck. What they did was purchase a used light duty truck over the internet at a price close to the cost of a new one. It needed repair work when it arrived and continued to do so. They sold their used heavy duty plow truck because one of the Village employees was unable to get a CDL drivers license to drive the heavier truck.

The trustees gave the schedule for plowing snow with their two employees. What they don't tell you is that the two new inexperienced employees evidently are not able to do what two previous employees could do alone. The last employee could easily plow the Village during his shift by himself. When Jim Remwolt worked previous to him, he could plow the Village in about four hours and had time to clear the sidewalks also. These two new employees are evidently harder on the trucks, to have them both with major mechanical problems at the same time. I guess it can be chalked up to the Village president hiring his neighbor kid and a friend's son and letting a very capable employee go. Not only that, but one of the current employees is making about twice of what the last very capable employee made. The board decided to pay the second employee \$12 per hour until he could get the proper CDL drivers license. Within a year, they gave him a raise and he still doesn't have the needed license. Several people have complained that the Village President, Roger Vanderstelt would not answer his phone, nor return calls either during the winter. I have been told that Roger said they would only be able to patch up streets for a few years because the Village council gave over \$100,000 of their maintenance money voluntarily to the township for a sewer line related road repair donation. Even after the Village attorney told them not to. They will be making payments for about four years to cover it from the road maintenance fund.

Some of the intersections were left with nearly a foot of slush for about a week at times. A very dangerous situation for cars stopping at stop signs and then trying to get going again. If both of their trucks were broke down, the corner slush problem could have been taken care of with a capable 4-wheel drive plow and they were available all over the place. Some would have probably helped out for free just because of the safety problem, especially around the schools. The trustees letter suggested that people can be arrested for not shovelling the sidewalk in front of their house. Most municipalities discovered years ago that it was difficult to expect people to do that. Some are unable to, some have to go to work in the morning and can't get to it until later, in addition, the Village has a snow-blower for that purpose. That's one of the reasons people pay the extra taxes to live in the Village. Previous administrations cleared the sidewalk for the Village residents. Why did they buy that machine if not to use it? Another instance is that they left the snow unplowed in the parking area along Third Avenue across from the drug store and left it that way for weeks. Then they brought an employee in on Sunday to clean it up at double time pay when they could easily have taken care of the snow during regular hours between snow storms. There are things like dumping sand into the lake at the end of Fourth Avenue without DEQ permission and then they had to have it removed from the lake. Its currently piled near the lake without properly securing it with a barrier.

There's the sign ordinance that regulates signs with changeable letters. The village has stated that it was changed to "create a clean satisfactory image of the Third Street business corridor" and "to assist in the fiscal stability in the village." Also to help with "the pursuit of new businesses and the success of the existing businesses in the village," etc., etc.

I don't know who wrote this ordinance up, but whoever it was didn't know that it's Third Avenue not Third Street and apparently no one on the board knew either. It goes down hill from there. Most of the existing signs will be unable to con-

form to the changed ordinance. Burger Crest has spent over \$1500 on their sign and it still doesn't conform. Most of the small businesses in the Village are not able to spend that kind of money. Suzi's Village Inn has attempted to change their sign to conform and it looks nice except its being used as a place to dump garbage. I suppose they will start arresting local small business people who are unable to make their sign conform. So much for helping "the success of the existing businesses in the Village" and "the pursuit of new business." I don't know how much they paid to have the new ordinance written up, but no one on the board evidently figures they are capable of doing any better than someone from someplace else and unfamiliar with the needs of this community.

Trustee Jerry Alger is the exception on the board but is continually outvoted. During the winter, Roger and company were going to sell the heavy duty plow truck to Mike, one of the Village employees, for \$500. Jerry complained at a board meeting that it was worth more than that. Roger told Jerry that if he thought he could sell it for more, do it. Jerry said okay and proceeded to list the truck on the internet. After a week, Roger sent an e-mail to all the Village trustees that Mike would still buy it for \$500. About that time Jerry had received some interested inquiries and was able to sell it for \$3500 within a few weeks. He probably could have gotten more for the Village if he had not felt pressured to sell it quickly. Trustee Rothenberger has recently, at a board meeting, attempted to trivialize Jerry's effort.

I believe that financially Jerry Alger is the most successful person on the Village council. Jerry is a life-long resident of the Village. He loves Fruitport and he has been active in various ways in the betterment of his community for many years. It is real frustrating for him to observe the Village board wasting taxpayers money and generally mis-managing the Village government.

Roger ran for office as a proponent of abandoning the village. His management is reinforcing that argument. There are some individually smart and nice people on the Village board, but together they make some incompetent and overbearing decisions. Its's like they're a bunch of zombies following a leader that's lost his way.

Ron Cooper, Editor

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