

Activist reflects on G'land issues

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By MARY LANNON

McKownville Improvement Association President Don Reeb has no doubt begun a lot of his conversations with neighbors and friends in the last 30 years with a chat about the latest projects that are proposed in town.

Reeb's latest concern is the deck proposed behind the Across the Street Pub on Western Avenue. He thinks it's a bad idea in what he considers a parking

□ Activist

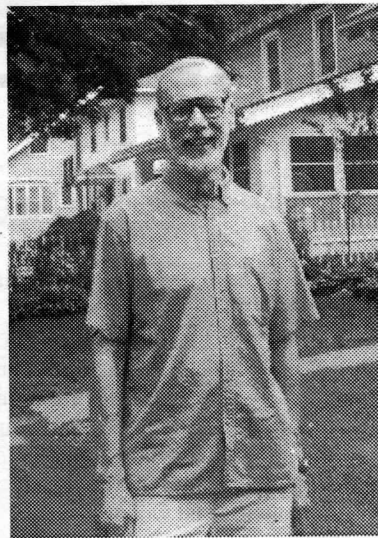
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strapped stretch of Western Avenue.

He also believes that the town's recent approval of Walgreens for the corner of routes 20 and 155 was a mistake.

During his almost 30 years of local neighborhood involvement Reeb has been opposed to other projects notably Crossgates Mall and later its expansion as well as supported numerous projects including Abele Park, sidewalks for Fuller Road and Western Avenue and the latest: the farmers market at Stuyvesant Plaza. Reeb, of course, has not stood alone but as part of the neighborhood association.

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But Reeb fears that those types of conversations that lead to community action are happening less and less in today's increasingly fast paced and demanding society. It's not because people are not interested in such civic matters, Reeb believes.

"Generally, people have found they have fewer and fewer hours of discretionary time," he said.

That's a shame, Reeb said, because he believes that life satisfaction often derives from improvements in people's local neighborhood.

"I think the way people feel about their lives has a great deal to do with their immediate environment," he said.

Supervisor Ken Runion, who presented Reeb with a town award honoring his service in May, said that McKownville certainly has flourished thanks to Reeb's activism.

"He's been instrumental in trying to improve the quality of life of the residents of McKownville," Runion said.

Reeb's strength lies in his grasp of the details of projects, added Runion who has known Reeb for about 20 years

"I think he does a good job of flushing out the issues that are involved on various projects," Runion said.

About 30 years ago, Reeb, 71, said he was drawn into the neighborhood association by the great people already in it, Lindsay Childs and Bill Meehan to name just two. But Reeb also arrived in McKownville with a fully developed interest in public policy and with community activism

already under his belt.

It's difficult, Reeb said, to trace his interest. But he does the work mostly because he enjoys it, enjoys having an effect. He grew up in the small town of Springfield, Ohio. Both of his grandparents owned bars, which meant, he said, they were interested in politics. Bar-owners had to be, he said, because government was often trying to pass laws that disrupted their businesses. In addition, local pols often campaigned in bars.

Reeb began at Ohio State in chemical engineering, but had to drop out because of a shortage of funds. He was then drafted to fight in the Korean War but remained stateside. After the war he returned to his hometown Wittenberg College and using the G.I. bill majored in political science and economics. He went on for advanced study at Syracuse University, ending up with a PhD in economics with a focus on public policy.

Politics even played a role in his personal life as he met his wife because he was giving out literature for the Democratic Party at a polling place in Syracuse. Before Albany, there was a stop at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he became involved in the Civil Rights movement.

Much of his scholarly work in economics at the State University of New York at Albany involved hot-button issues of the day: acid rain, the bottle bill and zoning in the Adirondack Park among them. Reeb also was involved in bringing the union for faculty to SUNY-Albany.

Reeb's passed his community spirit on to his two daughters, one of which is a clinical psychologist who works in Family Court and the other who is a lawyer for the state's Children and Family Services.

Of all the work with the neighborhood association, Reeb said, he believes that the fight against Crossgates stands out the most for him and for his neighbors. They managed, he said, to alter the project significantly to better handle traffic; they also defeated the addition. It really brought people together, he said.

"I think there's an awful lot of people in Guilderland who remember those days. It looms large in the town's history," Reeb said.