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TOM WARD - Alba's courteous move: Smart'politics' without trying to be

In a world where, sadly, some local representatives consider public input at city or town meetings a nuisance, the request last week by Councilor Suzy Alba of Smithfield comes as a breath of fresh air.

Gerry Goldstein reports: "Already paying out-of-pocket to provide the public with coffee and pastry before Town Council meetings, Councilwoman Suzanna Alba has now turned her attention to a different variety of buns.



"In response to a general feeling that the seat of government here tortures the backsides of the citizenry, Alba has used \$150 of her council salary to buy 20 padded cushions for the rock-hard wooden chairs in the council chamber."

Allow me to get back to Gerry's fabulous writing in a moment.

Most towns and boards have set up rules regarding public comment, and I don't doubt they are necessary. Still, the occasional long meeting can have residents sitting around for hours waiting to speak on a certain agenda item. Alba's kindness is just that: a kindness, as is her purchase of snacks for the public at council meetings. Sometimes, the best "politics" isn't about issues at all, but just common courtesy. I applaud Alba and her efforts to keep the public more comfortable at town meetings.

As for Gerry, he will be missed. With today's Breeze & Observer, he writes his final regular stories for us as he moves on to a new endeavor. We wish him great success.

Gerry, a retired and award-winning Providence Journal reporter and editor, settled into Smithfield some years ago and came to us to do some writing - part-time - to keep busy. If you know Gerry, you know "retirement" will never come easily to him.

Taking the reins in our Observer area towns will be Staff Writer Meghan Kavanaugh, a Cumberland native and Boston University grad who has been writing for us for a few years now, and doing a great

job. I'm sure her fine work will continue.

As for our friend Gerry, we wish him well. "A different variety of buns." Sheesh. His clever and enjoyable writing will be "sorely" missed.

Best wishes

On a personal note, I'd like to publicly offer my best wishes for recovery to Bob Lafleur, the chairman of the North Smithfield School Committee. He is suffering from cancer, still serving as best he can, and will step down in 2016.

Bob was one of the very first to step forward, then on behalf of the Utility Contractors Association of R.I., to help this newspaper fund the Scripps State Spelling Bee each March when the Journal dropped its support many years ago. Now, Bob helps through the R.I. Independent Contractor & Associates, and the support is appreciated. Get well, Bob.

Good news, but it could be better

Last week officials in Woonsocket announced that emergency police and fire dispatch services would be consolidated, an effort which began in 2011. The Police Department has been using civilian dispatchers; the Fire Department has been using its least senior firefighters separately. Now, civilians will work from one location. This year the city will absorb the costly start-up costs. After that, the savings will begin.

I'm delighted that Mayor Baldelli-Hunt and the Budget Commission have approved this change, but disappointed that the discussions on regional dispatch services between northern Rhode Island communities have gone nowhere. Let's face it, in little Rhode Island, there is no reason for each city and town to have separate services (and all their costs), but we have them anyway. The price of the status quo - statewide - continues to bite.

Governor Chafee has declared that this Thursday, May 1, be a "Day of Reason" in Rhode Island. One day in 365. I guess we have to start somewhere.

Ward is publisher of The Valley Breeze newspapers

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