

The TIMES

of Smithtown Township

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75C



Contraption competition

Robotics teams from school districts across Long Island, including Smithtown, pictured above, put their machines to the test Saturday at the FIRST Robotics Competition at Hofstra University. See story on page A2.

Courtesy Carol Gibbons

S'town moves on reserve Board agrees to capital fund with lower ceiling, voters to have final say on investing leftover \$

BY EDWARD J. HUNT
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The Smithtown school board is moving ahead with a plan to save unspent funds in reserve aimed at long-term facilities upgrades.

At its meeting last Tuesday, the Board of Education approved three propositions concerning the proposed capital reserve fund. This reserve is envisioned to pay for maintenance of district buildings and facilities for the next few years without the need to borrow.

The reserve would be funded by a surplus from this year's budget, estimated to be about \$12.4 million. Of that sum, the board is considering placing about \$9.1 million into the capital reserve fund.

These propositions will be up for public vote at district elections and budget in May.

The capital reserve fund, if approved, would be capped at a maximum of \$25

million and would expire after five years. The ceiling has been decreased from the \$40 million cap discussed at the facilities committee meeting March 20.

Superintendent Ed Ehmann explained the concept of the reserve fund.

"In addition to paring down expenses for this year and next year, we are also taking monies ... that have been in the budget for a number of years," he said. "What we want to do with this money is apply it to the facilities of this district to cut down on the maintenance and operations costs of the facilities in future years. The capital reserve fund gives us the mechanism to utilize these funds in a way that has savings down the road, and the community will also see an improvement in the facilities."

Two other propositions were also placed on the slate for the May election.

One would authorize the Board of

Continued on page A8

Developer admits to bribing town official

Frank Esposito gave \$10k to former Building chief to 'expedite' Nesconset construction

BY JOE DABROW
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A leading Smithtown area developer has admitted to bribing the former town building chief, and now faces up to a year behind bars.

Frank Esposito, 72, of Nissequoque pleaded guilty Monday afternoon to third-degree bribery before Judge Martin Efman at Suffolk County criminal court in Riverhead. Esposito had surrendered at the district attorney's Hauppauge office earlier that day.

Esposito is the president of Trio Leasing Company and owner of multiple real estate and land development firms. He was the founding director of the Long Island Commercial Bank as well as a former Suffolk County Off-Track Betting chairman.

In the courtroom, Esposito confirmed Assistant District Attorney Kevin Ward's account of the developer's bribery of former Smithtown Building Director and Chief Building Inspector Bob Bonerba.

Ward described how Esposito, as co-owner of Dartmouth Properties, met with Bonerba twice between March and November of 2003 to give the town official a total of \$10,000 — in installments of \$5,000 per meeting — to "expedite" the firm's construction of a home at 9 Pierson Street in Nesconset.

Ward's questioning did not go into detail on the "preferential treatment on this project" Esposito received for the bribe, but the prosecutor later said it was likely to have accelerated the town's approval process.

Efman set a June 20 sentencing date and said Esposito would be sentenced to up to one year in prison. The judge also ordered him to pay the district attorney's office \$250,000 in restitution. The amount

represents the profits Esposito's firm reaped from the Pierson Street construction project, Ward said. Esposito was released without bail.

Esposito declined to comment to reporters' questions when leaving the courtroom.

"Today's plea is an important step forward in dismantling corruption in the Town of Smithtown," said Christopher McPartland, chief of Suffolk's government corruption bureau. In a press release District Attorney Tom Spota said Esposito has entered into a cooperation agreement with his office.

Developer Robert Fitzpatrick of Bayport also faces criminal charges due to his involvement in the Pierson Street home's construction. He was arrested last November on charges of filing false documents with the town Building Department, which prosecutors say fictitiously claimed that Fitzpatrick owned the Pierson property and, instead of building a new home, was merely expanding a pre-existing structure. Fitzpatrick has pleaded not guilty.

Despite his implication in the crime, prosecutors said no charges had yet been leveled against former town Building Director Bonerba, who retired in December 2006 amidst investigation into his incomplete financial disclosure forms.

Bonerba had asserted his legal right to avoid self-incrimination instead of listing all sources of outside income; the D.A. has since subpoenaed numerous records from the Building Department in a prolonged investigation.

Bonerba could not be reached for comment.

"It's an ongoing investigation and we're not done in the Town of Smithtown," Ward said.



Courtesy Suffolk D.A.'s office
Frank Esposito, 72, of Nissequoque



Anti-war, 'pro-veteran' protesters face off

Elderly peace demonstrator arrested when he takes debate inside mall

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KP softball squad looks to defend league title

But Kingsmen must regroup after losing eight players to graduation

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Herstory writing workshops

Turning women's stories into literature

Page B1



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Courtesy PRMG

An enthusiastic crowd roots on the robots Saturday at the FIRST Robotics Competition.

The sum of all gears

Robots run wild at Island's FIRST competition

BY KYLE REITAN

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Teams from dozens of regional high schools glimpsed the future Friday and Saturday at Hofstra University.

During the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology Robotics Competition, sponsored locally by the School-Business Partnership of Long Island Inc., teams of high-schoolers put their automations to the test. The inventors — including squads from Hauppauge and Smithtown — constructed robots to compete in a game

called Overdrive, in which the mechanical beings sped around a track, pushing colored balls as they went.

Each participating team received a kit containing materials and instructions and had six weeks to build

a better robot at a maximum weight of 130 pounds. After each round, teams were allowed to take their robots into the pits for tinkering.

At stake was a trip to the FIRST USA championships, scheduled for April 17 to 19 at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta. That honor went to the teams from Patchogue-Medford High School (Chairman's Award); Brearly and Chapin high schools of New York City (Engineering Inspiration Award); Sayville High School (Regional Winner No. 1), Champion High School of Warren, Ohio (Regional Winner No. 2); and Somerville High School of Somerville, N.J. (Regional Winner No. 3).

Regional finalists included squads from Hauppauge, Lindenhurst and Sayville high schools. William Floyd High School won the Chrysler Team Spirit Award and Comsewogue High School won the Delphi "Driving Tomorrow's Technology" Award; the Hauppauge squad also captured the "Musical Theme" award, while West Islip High School captured the competition's "Greening Award."

All told, some 1,500 teams from every state and countries as far afield as Israel

and Brazil are participating in this year's FIRST Robotics Competition, according to a media release. The event was founded 22 years ago by inventor Dean Kamen "to inspire an appreciation of science and technology in young people, their schools and communities," the release said.

Participants offered unanimously positive views of the competition. Sophomore Mike Morales of the Hauppauge team said the competition fosters "leadership and the right attitude," while senior Pete Gibbons of Smithtown High School East said teamwork was at the top of his squad's list.

"That's a really great part about FIRST," added John Gibbons, Team Smithtown's advisor. "Not teamwork only in each team, but the alliance you're in during each round."

Veterans of previous FIRST competitions noted that Overdrive was a bit of a change-up — "The obstacle was a little different," said Miller Place High School junior Mike Paradzinsky. "It was a new type of game" — but most competitors marveled at both their competitors' clever designs and at the chance to try new approaches to robot-building.

Team Hauppauge's robot, for instance, had both high and low gears, while several teams tried out a new type of steering system, called "omni wheels."

"If it wants to slide, it can slide," described sophomore Steven Tremblui of Comsewogue High School. "If it wants to drive, it can drive."

"All teams demonstrated tremendous teamwork, professionalism and strategic thinking," Fred Breithut, founder and chairman of the SBPLI, said in a written statement. "The fun and excitement of the competition was evident as many students, professional mentors, school groups and community members ... came to cheer on their favorite teams as engineering and technology at work surpassed the excitement of a championship athletic event."

'All teams demonstrated tremendous teamwork ... and strategic thinking.'

—FRED BREITHUT
SBPLI