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SUNY investigating Research Foundation chief's employment at non-profit foundation

BY LEDGER STAFF



This month ain't getting better for John J. O'Connor, the embattled head of the SUNY Research Foundation.

The State University of New York Board of

Trustees voted to approve the hiring of a major, national accounting firm to review any links between SUNY, the Research Foundation, and the American Ditchley Foundation – the organization that paid \$85,000 to O'Connor as its executive director.

This comes after O'Connor was reprimanded by the state's Public Integrity Commission for giving Susan Bruno, the daughter of former Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno (R-Brunswick), a \$70,000 no-show job at the Research Foundation, one-third of what comprises SUNY (the other third is the SUNY Construction Fund).

The American Ditchley Foundation is a branch of the Ditchley Foundation, which – according to its website – “was established by Sir David Wills in 1958 to advance international learning and to bring transatlantic and other experts together to discuss international issues. Sir David's original objective was to promote Anglo-American understanding. American and Canadian sister Foundations, set up in 1964 and 1981 respectively, remain our most active partners.”

The foundation's board of directors includes former NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue and current New York State Republican Committee chair Edward Cox.

O'Connor, who is paid \$276,000 by SUNY, was instrumental in Chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher's efforts to raise SUNY administrators' pay by \$30,000 annually last year. According to sources, O'Connor has been a force within the system since Governor George Pataki's second term (O'Connor was named Research Foundation head in 2000 and became Vice Chancellor in 1997).

O'Connor is currently on voluntary leave from SUNY. **KL**

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Republican Nathan Lebron enters Albany County Executive race



BY LEDGER STAFF

We got ourselves a gunshow!

Nathan Lebron, 40, has announced he will seek the Republican nomination for Albany County Executive this fall.

Lebron, who currently works as an information technology consultant and most recently had been employed with the State Liquor Authority, ran in 2009 as a Republican for Mayor of Albany against eventual winner Gerald D. Jennings and Corey Ellis.

From Lebron's statement:

“After numerous discussions with fellow party members and Capital Region Democrats who strongly disagree with the current 'democratic process', I am compelled to offer the voters of this great county an opportunity at a critical time. The issues affecting us today transcend political ideology. This race must focus on changing the culture of established politics, controlling costs and spending, ensuring our infrastructure is strong and vibrant for the future and giving all voters in Albany County a voice. Our county not only has urban centers but has a unique blend of bedroom communities, agriculture and industry. County Government must be responsive to all voters.”

Lebron, if unchallenged, would face County Legislature Chairman Daniel P. McCoy, the Democratic candidate and presumptive nominee, in the general election. Sources speculate that a county run could cost upwards of \$250,000. **KL**

The latest news can be found at KnickLedger.com

Your Choice 2011

Schenectady Mayoral Candidate Hull: Buy a Home, Hello Scholarship!

BY LEDGER STAFF

Roger Hull wants you to buy a home and have an education!

The Schenectady mayoral candidate and former Union College president has announced a plan to create a privately funded scholarship for new homeowners to attend Schenectady County Community College if elected Mayor. The fund would be set up for up to twenty five students to attend the two-year institution.



Hull, who is running on the Alliance Party line, started a similar program at Union in 1998 for potential homeowners who bought property either on Seward Place or Erie Boulevard would be eligible for up to \$22,000 in tuition to the college.

Schenectady County Community College has not yet commented on the proposal, in which they are not a formal partner of. **KL**

Your Choice 2011

Higgins fundraiser the social start to Campaign 2011

BY LEDGER STAFF

With a crowd of over 100 in attendance, County Legislator Christopher T. Higgins hosted his re-election kickoff fundraiser at the Center Square Pub in what should be an ambitious drive for another four years.

Higgins, 31 – who was elected in 2007 first in a primary race that could have been titled, “the Battle of the Christopher T’s” against Chris Burke and in the general election that included realtor R.A. DePrima as well – was joined by electeds that ranged from U.S. Representative Paul D. Tonko (D-N.Y.), City Treasurer Katherine M. Sheehan, Common Council President Pro Tempore Richard Conti, Council Members Leah Golby and Anton Konev, as well as District Attorney P. David Soares. Additionally, both candidates for Albany City Court Judge, Sherri Brooks and Helena Heath-Roland, were also in attendance as well as 2009 and expected 2013 mayoral candidate Corey Ellis.

(disclosure: Higgins’s campaign site is managed by Sunbear Design & Media, a unit of BASKnickerbocker Inc., the parent company of BAS News).

Arts and Entertainment

Architects and Engineers: An Interview with Ryan Miller of Guster



BY RANDY ROSE

On Wednesday, May 4, Guster was at Northern Lights in Clifton Park in support of their 2010 release, *Easy Wonderful*. In anticipation of their show, I caught up with Ryan Miller, lead singer and multi-instrumentalist.

Having first seen the band perform at Northern Lights in 1999, and most recently at Jillian’s this past fall, the timing of both the upcoming show and the interview seemed fated. But no matter what your Myers-Briggs personality test results, it isn’t always easy to feel comfortable on either end of an interview: one person asking probing questions; the other potentially revealing personal information to a complete stranger, even if that stranger is a fan. Talking to Ryan was nothing of the sort. What set out to be a ten minute interview quickly turned into a 30-minute conversation. Immediately, tensions were eased through the shared experience of fatherhood, jokes about sitting in Bronx traffic, and an odd reference to Richard Marx. Once these formalities were out of the way, Ryan spilled the beans on all the secrets that make Guster the band they are today.

KL: Last October at Jillian’s in Albany, the band changed roles and swapped instruments a number of times and even changed the set list up on the fly. Is this spontaneity typical for any given Guster performance?



More significantly, Higgins’s fundraiser was the real summer social start to Campaign 2011. Two weeks ago, County Legislature Chairman Daniel P. McCoy announced his candidacy during the day – in which the event had a more family-friendly appeal. Both McCoy and Albany Mayor Gerald D. Jennings were not in attendance.

The fundraiser was also significant in the fact that it came two days after the Albany County Redistricting Commission held its most recent hearing, which affects a number of candidates as well as current office holders for this year.

RYAN MILLER: Definitely the instruments we change almost every song. We’ve been a band for so long and we tend to write songs in all these different permutations. We all kind of play everything so when we’re writing it’s like, “I have a keyboard idea,” or, “I started this song on the bass,” or even, “Hey, Brian [Rosenworcel, Guster drummer/percussionist], try this here,” so when it comes time to record, we all just play the instrument we wrote the song on, and that’s what we do when we play live, as well. So the short answer is yes. As far as changing up the set list, not as much – I mean, we do try to keep it relatively loose on stage, but not crazy. It’s not a Phish show, where it’s like, “Let’s play this song for 4 hours.”

KL: How do you even prepare a set list for a show or tour? Are you rotating a set throughout each show on a tour?

RM: For this tour, we play about a third of the set from the new record and the rest is the quote-unquote “greatest-er hits” from the last other five records. But we mix it up. We’ve made six records, which is about 70 songs or something. We have about 40 or so of them in a regular rotation and we’ll play about 20 in a night.

KL: You just mentioned that you have six records, roughly 70 songs. You’ve got a live DVD and you’ve been together as a band, with the same 3 core members, for 20 years at this point. Most marriages don’t last half that long. How do you manage to keep the sanity and the friendships intact without wanting to kill each other?

RM: Those dudes are my brothers. I met them when I was 17 years old and I’m almost 40. We’re a family now, and I think that has remained an important factor. And being a band is something that we’re all still really interested in doing.

To read the rest of Randy’s interview, visit knickledger.com. **KL**

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Cavalcade

City of Power and State of Scandal Go Hand-In-Hand



BY JOE BONILLA

Exclusive to the Knickerbocker Ledger

William Kennedy’s novels – from “Roscoe” to “Ironweed” always defined one singular phrase: Oh, Albany!

The phrase remains so ever true in the light of the current Research Foundation scandal involving John J. O’Connor, Susan Bruno, and a pile of time sheets that were conspicuously approved. Now, this incident may highlight the actuality of what the Research Foundation (see Merriam-Webster for ‘cesspool of political appointees’) has become, but it’s nothing new for a city that has the Empire State’s leadership in its backyard.

O’Connor’s troubles are just the latest in the litany of scandals that affect both state and region affairs. Susan Bruno, the ill-equipped daughter of former State Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, received \$80,000 annually under O’Connor’s watch. Surprising? Hardly. Eliot Spitzer, Alan Hevesi, Joe Bruno – the list goes on.

In fact, the two Albany’s – the city known as the state capital and the city known for having the longest running political machine in American history – are meant for each other. Endless love, really. Don’t get me wrong – they are benefits for both and harms a-plenty (see: Empire State Plaza PILOT). The plentiful fundraisers, the out-of-region dollars that fill Albany’s restaurants and hotels, the inoculation from the economic plight that affects every other upstate city (i.e. “Little Detroit” – Schenectady) – all factors that make Albany at least livable through the three seasons of the year – winter, fall, and construction.

The “other Albany” – the one that people west of Lark Street exist in – has seen only three mayors in the last seventy years (Erastus Corning for 42, Tom Whalen for 10, Jerry Jennings for 18 and counting) while the Executive Mansion has seen twelve governors in the same time. Other Albany has seen the rise of charter schools decimate the public school district, lack of cohesive neighborhood and economic planning, the direction of revitalization dollars focused on downtown (apparently Schenectady also followed the same trick – go beyond Proctors and find yourself in a world of hurt), and political roughhousing that would make Dan O’Connell smile. The 2009 campaign, however, began the process of “democratizing” City Hall with the election of Kathy Sheehan and Leif Engstrom as Treasurer and Auditor, respectively. Jennings, in his twilight term, still dominates the debate, which has now devolved to legislation regarding “urban agriculture” and the allowance of city residents to have chickens in their backyards.

Even Albany County’s no Saint. The \$68.6 million dollar Times Union Center (prior associated names: Knickerbocker Arena, Pepsi Arena), opened in 1990, was at the center of a bid scandal involving then-Albany County Executive Jim Coyne allegedly selling his apparent influence to the building’s architect, Crozier & Associates, for \$30,000 (Coyne served 46 months in jail).

Albany, to a degree, emulates the two Washingtons – the one on TV where the President and Congress play and the one that Marion Barry ran. Seats of government benefit immensely from the prestige (or lack thereof) of having the annals of power around, but it comes with a significant price. Albany gets the Empire State Plaza (thanks Mayor... err Governor Rockefeller), but the State Capitol has been under renovation for most of my lifetime

Oh, Albany... **KL**