

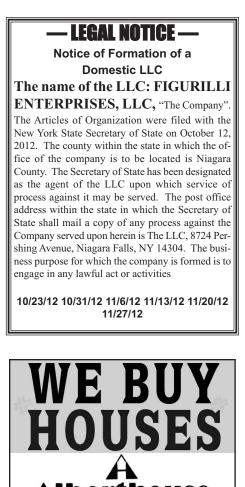
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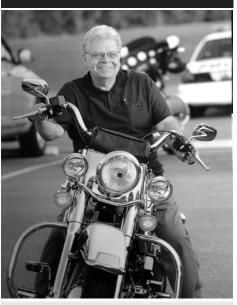


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# While Falls flounders, Town of Niagara flourishes

# Frank Parlato



### Steve Richards

They must be doing something right.

While the city of Niagara Falls is floundering, its municipal government spending money faster than they can raise taxes to pay for it, the town of Niagara just passed a budget with a tax reduction.

Town Supervisor Steve Richards, who led the charge to reduce the budget, said of his new budget, "I've been right-sizing the town government for several years."

He's not kidding.

There are fewer government employees than there were before he was elected 17 years ago.

While the town is down in population by about 1,000 people to around 8,500, Richards has done something remarkable. The tax rate is lower now than when he came into office.

"You cannot lose population and lose growth and keep increasing government," Richards said, "or you wind up like the state or the federal government or the city of Niagara Falls."

Richards along with council members Charles Teixeira and Danny Sklarski voted to reduce taxes for homestead residents by 9.3 percent and businesses by 6.8 percent.

Council members Marc M. Carpenter and Robert A Clark voted against it.

Clark told the Reporter that he was not opposed to cutting taxes, but wanted more time to study whether there might be other places to "cut fat."

For combined water, sewer, recreation and fire, residents will pay \$4.71 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

The commercial tax rates is 8.47 per thousand.

The town enjoys free garbage pickup after Richards made a deal with Allied Waste in return for permitting a landfill in the town. Free garbage collection is worth around \$200 per year for the average homeowner and about \$500 per year for commercial properties, according to Richards.

The Reporter asked Richards why he wasn't looking to expand government so he can do more "good deeds" for the world?

"I just don't trust government to do the good deeds," Richards said. "Typical government, they get an extra \$500,000 and they hire \$600,000 worth of salaries and then they put their friend to work. It's all about jobs in government."

In order to effect the tax decrease Richards' budget cut  $1\frac{1}{2}$  jobs saving the town \$110,562.

The jobs, however, are in the building inspections department and critics of Richards said it was political payback against inspector Jeff Stahlman who is said to be allied with Richards' long time critic, Clark.

Comparing Town of Niagara with nearby towns, Wheatfield and Lewiston, Richards' argument to cut the building inspection department from a three person department to a  $1\frac{1}{2}$  person staff might make sense.

The Town of Niagara has two building inspectors and a clerk for a population of 8,378,

There was only one new home built in the town last year.

The Town of Lewiston has a population of 16,262 and built 12 homes. Lewiston has only one building inspector and one clerk.

The Town of Wheatfield has 18,450 and built 64 homes. They have only one building inspector and one clerk.

Richards is adamant that he is not interested in job creation on the backs of the taxpayer.

"When you have a politician that comes on board who cares about (government) jobs more than the people, you have problems," Richards said, "My town comes first. You got a friend that needs a job? I am not hiring. And I'm not going to create one for you so I can get political contributions."

Richards practices what he preaches. He closed his campaign account 15 years ago. He may be the only politician in Western New York that does not accept campaign contributions.

Richards speaks with pride about how he has never sought to use his influence to get any one connected to him a government job. His wife works as a janitor, actually sweeping floors in the Niagara Wheatfield School.