

GUEST COLUMN

## Community pride, community service

BY JOSEPH PETITO



“Why did you buy a house in Hyde Park?” my good friend Corey asked me. It was one of our first parties in our new home, almost three years ago. I was flipping burgers by my garage while my

wife worried whether our guests were enjoying the 20 or so hors d’oeuvres she had labored over. With all the excitement around me, and knowing my friend was just making conversation, I do not recall how I answered his question. At that time, my life was moving very quickly. Within 12 months, I had taken the New York State Bar Exam and passed it, gotten married, begun practicing law and soon found out that my wife and I were having a baby. Did I mention I was 27 years old at the time?

My life is still is moving faster than I expected, but has slowed slightly. Our daughter, Kira, is 2 years old: running, jumping, talking (a lot), yelling (a lot) and bossing me around. Like many young people beginning their existence as a family unit, Sara and I were riddled with school debt, a mortgage, taxes, and the increased cost of living. But, we had our first home as a family. In my experience, home ownership not only instills pride in one’s self, but strengthens pride in a community. Sara, Kira and I became part of our neighborhood.

During the first year we owned our home, we began to engage in discussions with our neighbors. We talked about taxes, electric bills, state government, local government and similar topics. During all the chats with them, one thing became clear: they were just neighborhood discussions. No bills made it to the Senate floor based on them, the tax rate never dropped and no journalist ever asked us for comments. Though I recall many passionate discussions, talking just never seemed to be enough for me.

Listening to and learning from my neighbors, I decided to become part of the solution – I ran for fire commissioner for the Fairview Fire District, a volunteer position. I was lucky enough to fill a vacancy, and then win the upcoming election. I ran a very simple paper campaign. A single sheet of paper, featuring my face and my principles, was wedged between every Fairview resident’s mailbox that I, and the many good

people who helped me, could find.

During my term as fire commissioner, I served on the Budget Committee, the Personnel Committee and the Long Range Plan Committee. I labored over the budget, participated in negotiations and helped orchestrate a public budget workshop. My goals as a commissioner were to increase transparency and have an open and honest dialogue with both taxpayers and firefighters. I like to think I helped accomplish those goals, with the help of other board members and the firefighters themselves.

In my time at Fairview Fire District, I’ve learned a lot about budgets, personnel issues and taxes – but more importantly, about people. Whether you are a municipal employee or a taxpayer, you want to feel relevant. If a problem is ignored, it will never be solved. Neighborly, backyard conversations are wonderful, but more is required if real change is to be accomplished.

This is why I am running to represent Ward 2 on the Hyde Park Town Board. It is time for a real change and a return to respect, responsibility and reinvestment in our community. The campaign I ran for election to Fairview not only helped me win the election, it also provided me with something that would become my political foundation. “The truth is found when men are free to pursue it.” That’s from Hyde Park’s own Franklin Delano Roosevelt. A simple adage to live by, yet something that, I feel, eludes many public officials. I would like to change that.

To be honest, I do not remember why I purchased my first home here in Hyde Park. In fact, the reason I purchased my home seems rather unimportant now – because it is my home. This alone is reason enough for me to continue to contribute as much as I can to this community.

I ask Ward 2 residents for their vote in November so that I can put my energy and experience to work on their behalf. I will listen to one and all as neighbors and work diligently to make our town a safe, prosperous and affordable place for us and our children. Please stay in touch with me and the rest of Team Hyde Park at [www.teamhydepark.com](http://www.teamhydepark.com).

*Joe Petito is an attorney and commissioner of the Fairview Fire District. He is seeking election to the Hyde Park Town Board to represent Ward 2 and has been endorsed by the Hyde Park Democratic Committee. Reach the Democratic Committee at [hydeparkdems@gmail.com](mailto:hydeparkdems@gmail.com). Respond to this column at [editorial@thehudsonvalleynews.com](mailto:editorial@thehudsonvalleynews.com).*