

Final Curtain Call?

The Port Washington community is celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Port Summer Show, a major event that draws hundreds of excited teens each year to the experience of producing a summer musical. The experience is invaluable, providing a chance for them to develop their musical and acting talents, promote their self esteem, build upon camaraderie and work hard together with volunteer parents towards a common goal.

Unfortunately, this tradition is seriously threatened by a lack of funding, most recently resulting in the announcement that the Port Youth Council (its major sponsor) cannot afford to fund the show. Although we are dependent upon donations from many sources, including generous major contributions from Port realtor Bob Harding (a major benefactor), the Police Benevolent Association, Varsity Coach and Marine Midland Bank, since the show's inception ten years ago, we have depended on the \$4,000 yearly funding from the Port Youth Council. On the anniversary of our 10th we are told they have "no money." They say all their funding is needed for the new Teen Center, which requires major funds for the activities, rent at the Landmark building and salaries for employees there - including an executive director. While we are grateful for the presence of a Teen Center, we must not lose sight of a tradition that is an important dimension to the Teen Center - and yes, as important as a Teen Center. A Summer show production that occupies the time, energy, talents and efforts of hundreds of teens for an entire summer each year.

The Port Youth Council (PYC) was formed in 1982 to develop projects and activities for the young people in Port Washington. Their funding is contingent on some local fundraising, donations, and money from the Town of North Hempstead and the Port Washington Community Chest. At one time, PYC supported a number of programs for youth including S.A.D.D/Safe-Rides, the Lifeguard Certification Program, the 5K Run and Spring Spirit Weekend. However, according to Regina Farinaccio, PYC's executive director, these programs have ceased to exist over the years. Leaving what? The Port Summer Show and (in the two recent years) the Teen Center. Farinaccio says PYC recognizes the importance of the continuation of the Port Summer Show, but the Teen Center has become their primary focus. "She will," she says, "continue to try to encourage funding in some way."

We are told that PYC must focus their attention to the Teen Center (which, by the way, is closed during the summer months). But what price do we have to pay for supporting this Teen Center? The future of the Port Summer Show is in serious jeopardy as a result and many of the original, year-round activities sponsored by PYC have been suspended. This should make us question the goals and objectives originally set forth by PYC and the priorities given to their spending. Is PYC really meeting the needs of the teen population in Port? Is the money primarily going to salaries and rent?

We know one thing for certain. At this writing, we (The Port Summer Show Board) will barely meet our costs when our show opens in one week. And most likely, there will be no show next summer since we have lost our invaluable funding from PYC. This all translates into the fact that there will be a lot of devastated teens in the community who each year eagerly anticipate this special tradition.

I believe - as do many, many others - that PYC, as well as the entire community, had better re-prioritize and not allow a highly regarded program for Port's youth to slip "down the drain". Remember that the Port Summer Show gives our teens the only opportunity to come together at all ages (grades 7-12) and to open doors to new artistic and musical opportunities. It is also keeping our youth in a constructive,