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On the Trail

Prepping for local elections

BY AMY ORINGEL

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At first it looked like a standard spring gathering in Bedford. The old, white wrap-around porch held several tiers of homemade desserts and a smattering of blue blazers mixed with faces young and old. But closer inspection—the town police directing traffic, for one—revealed the agenda. Locals had come to the home of Paul and Kate Galligan to support **David Menken**, a candidate for



town justice. Those running for local office may not scramble for airtime on

Local campaign managers **Bea Rhodes** and **Kate Galligan** work tirelessly for their candidates.

PHOTO BY SCOTT MULLIN

“Face the Nation” or throw \$2,700-per-plate soirees, but they have the same basic campaigning needs as candidates at the national level. The keys to the kingdom come via effective fundraising, the right advisers, and very hard work.

There’s nothing more valuable during a local campaign than being face to face with potential voters. Whether it’s handing out pamphlets at the train station, meeting with advocacy groups like the Sierra Club, or knocking on door after door after door after door, the work is draining and labor-intensive. For everyone. Bedford town-board member **Don Scott**, who says his wife, Stephanie, shook just as many hands as he did, explains, “It’s like going to the gym. It’s exhausting, but in the car ride home afterward, you are really glad you did it.”

Pound Ridge’s **Ali Boak** who is currently running for a high-profile seat in the state senate says, “In a lot of ways being a good candidate has the same requirements as being a good elected official. You need to understand the top issues and priorities in your district. And, more than anything, put yourself out there.”

Unlike our neighbors **Donald Trump** and **Hillary Clinton**, local candidates are our actual neighbors, ones with college tuitions and car payments. With expenses like signage, mailers, and other line items, raising money is crucial to the process. Here, personal reputation can be of help in attracting both dollars and other kinds of support.

Bedford Town Supervisor **Chris Burdick**, who was reelected last fall to a second term, says, “People have impressions about what kind of a guy I am. Those kinds of opinions develop just as they do at the national level. Character is important to a voter’s evaluation of any candidate. And it should be.” **Bea Rhodes**, Burdick’s campaign manager, says, “When you have a candidate who is willing to work harder than anyone else, it’s nothing short of inspiring. At the local level, it’s easy to tell if the commitment is real.”

But image counts here as well. Social-media efforts, debate prep, and wardrobe consultation are all part of a local campaign manager’s domain, as well as the management of a team of (hopefully) enthusiastic volunteers. The storybook camaraderie that develops on the campaign trail happens here, too, even if the trail just leads back and forth to The Reading Room. **Kate Galligan**, who managed **Mary Ann Carr**’s successful effort for town board says, “We became a close bunch. I particularly loved getting younger people involved. At one point I had a whole bunch of teenagers in my living room licking envelopes. I paid them in pizza.”

And while the pressing issues of a local campaign may involve paving roads and preserving trees instead of protecting a woman’s right to choose, those closest to the process insist that every election matters. Bea Rhodes says, “These small-scale elections are often the entry point for candidates who end up seeking higher political office. When choosing who to represent you, it’s always good to keep the bigger picture in mind.”

*This article appears in the [September/October 2016](#) issue of *TownVibe Bedford**

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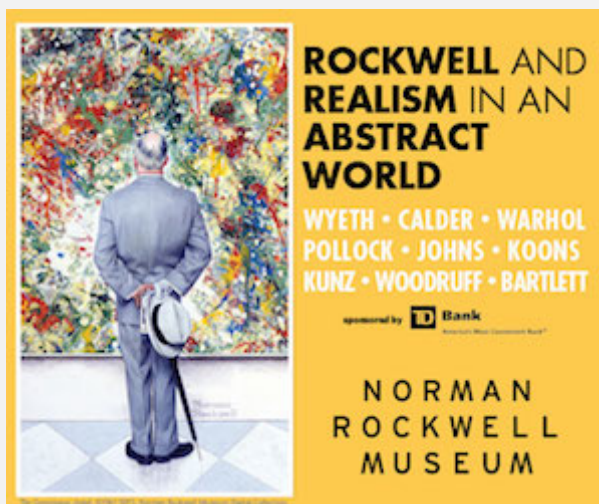
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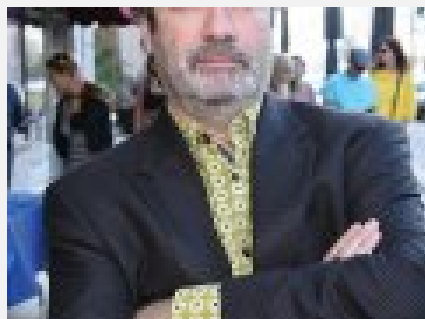
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