

The reason for no fireworks in Cheektowaga this July

By **Jim Herr** - June 23, 2017



CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. – The Town of Cheektowaga will not light the fuse on fireworks in Town Park this 4th of July because of the recent disbandment of the Cheektowaga Patriotic Commission says Supervisor Diane Benczkowski.

She tells Cheektowaga Chronicle that her office received official notice from the Cheektowaga Patriotic Commission on March 14, 2017, citing, “that due to unforeseen circumstances the organization will not sponsor or organize the 2017 parade.” Ms. Benczkowski’s office assumed it was the whole event.

“They did everything. They did the parade, they did the fireworks, they hired a band, they ran the beer tent for two nights,” continued Ms. Benczkowski.

The letter was sent to the Supervisor’s office a few months following a war or words in The Cheektowaga Bee’s December editorial sections between then President Paul Mazgajewski and Ms. Benczkowski.

Mr. Mazgajewski wrote that Town officials were cutting all activities short of the parade and because of that, the Commission was withdrawing their participation.

“My response was, that’s incorrect, you’ve always had received the \$20,500,” added Ms. Benczkowski.

2017 funding was earmarked in the Town Budget

Cheektowaga Chronicle examined the adopted Town Budgets dating back to 2010 – specifically, the Celebrations Department under the Town’s General Fund.

The Patriotic Commission received \$16,500 in both 2010 and 2011. The Town increased their funding to \$20,500 in 2012, and it has remained the same every year – including the 2017 budget.

The Commission needs to write an annual report to the Town accounting for every dollar spent on the previous year’s activities. A letter drafted by the Town Attorney was sent to the Commission a few months into the New Year of 2016.

“I think that’s when everything went sour. He had questioned them about certain expenditures and I think they didn’t like that,” continued Ms. Benczkowski.

She says it appeared the group inappropriately used the grant money to host a member’s only Christmas Party and Summer picnic.

The Cheektowaga Chronicle reached out to the former President of the Commission Paul Mazgajewski in the beginning of June when we were starting to investigate this matter. Mr. Mazgajewski did not want to comment at that time. We contacted him again following our conversation with the Supervisor Friday, and he had this say.

“I’m going to say this and I’m going to mean this from the bottom of my heart. When you’re given a grant from the town, there’s no misappropriation of funds if you give it to the town (citizens). We never – she sent me a letter – I don’t even want to get involved in this okay? I’m serious. Because I’m so upset about what she’s saying – it’s terrible,” said Mr. Mazgajewski.

Many volunteers needed to host the event

The Supervisor said her office couldn't host the large-scale event residents are accustomed to without the help of outside volunteers – that's why the town would not have fireworks this year.

Major events such as the [West Seneca's Community Days](#) event and [Williamsville's Old Home Days](#) are run by similar commissions in those municipalities.

"I need somebody to come over and let's get the Patriotic Commission back together again. New people can take it over and elect new officers and get membership growing. We're ready to help them. The money is set aside. I think it's very important that a town has a patriotic commission," said Ms. Benczkowski.

So what is happening with the \$20,500 earmarked for the Patriotic Commission for 2017? A small portion of that money is being used to help pay for the Independence Day Parade.

[The Rickey Lee concert](#) is sponsored by Assemblymember Monica Wallace, the Walden Galleria, and [Vets H.E.R.D.](#) Pott's Deli is running the beer tent, and a portion of the income will go to the Vets H.E.R.D. organization. The Cheektowaga Chamber of Commerce is hosting a food drive to benefit the Resurrection Life Church.

Fireworks in Cheektowaga aren't gone for good but residents need to step up to the plate, and volunteer says Ms. Benczkowski.

"We will still continue to earmark funds for the Patriotic Commission for future years. I'm hoping that would help get fireworks back. Right now, I'm disappointed, I've lived here all my life, and there aren't going to be any fireworks in two weeks," said Ms. Benczkowski.

Mr. Mazgajewski's wife, Sharon Napier Mazgajewski, responded to this article on June 25th via a comment on our Facebook page.

"I am tired of the Patriotic Commission getting the blame for no fireworks on the 4th of July. My Husband was called into a meeting in September and was told no beer tent, no food trucks, no fireworks on the 4th. He was also told the over time for the police was getting way to high for the 4th. We informed Ms. Benczkowski in Oct. we were not going to be involved in the 4th activities. March is when we handed in the paper work and remaining money. We didn't disband the organization. We just can't get new members. The majority of our members range from 60- 90 and is is too much for us. If anyone is willing to take over the organization please do. I want to tell you a little about our members. Our members work hard getting