Civic Education is Alive and Well in Irondequoit

Week of March 18, 2019

One of the great joys of serving as Town Supervisor is the opportunity to engage and interact with the youth of Irondequoit, particularly in the school environment. It allows me to discuss the role of government in a civil society. But more importantly, it gives me the chance to listen to our younger generations and better understand how they view issues impacting their community.

I have always believed in the importance of civic education in preparing our younger generations to become active citizens in their democracy. In fact, I wrote my senior thesis in college about the relationship between a decline in civic education and the voluntary departure of younger generations from civic engagement. Seventeen years later, I am very encouraged with the role that civic education is playing in our community.

In January, to help kick off their first ever Citizenship Conference, I had the pleasure of speaking to the senior class at Irondequoit High School. This event was designed to encourage these teenagers to become involved in their community. As was demonstrated by the very diverse panel of presenters at the conference, being an active citizen doesn’t necessarily mean actively participating in government. Rather, it can range from heading an initiative like Habitat for Humanity to running a neighborhood association.

I am perhaps the proudest of the youth in this Town when I engage them on the most serious of issues impacting our community. Earlier this month, I spent a morning at Eastridge High School, along with members of our Drug-Free Irondequoit (D-FI) Together Coalition. We were able to get honest feedback on the perceptions of drug and substance use amongst teenagers, as well as some of the primary forces motivating our youth to use drugs. This feedback is invaluable as we work to curb addiction in Irondequoit. A similar listening session was held in West Irondequoit last year.

Recently, we had our annual visitations at Town Hall by the third-grade classes in West Irondequoit – all 12 of them! During their brief time spent as “Honorary Councilmembers” in the Town Board Meeting Room, we discussed the role of government in our lives. This year, I asked the question: “If you - as Councilmembers - had $100,000 to spend on something in our community, what would it be?”

Some of the answers were geared towards what you’d expect from a 9-year old: more playgrounds, a water park. However, the most common theme in their responses was centered on a desire to help those less fortunate, particularly the homeless. How encouraging to see such selflessness in children! I eagerly look forward our 2nd grade visitors from East Irondequoit later this year.

I would like to thank our school districts for their commitment to encouraging their students to become active members of their community. As Supervisor, I will continue to embrace the many opportunities to interact with our students as fellow citizens.