

Public Domain

by Steve Krulick, Senior Civics Columnist

Be Kind, Rewind

January is named for Janus, the two-headed god of the Romans. One face looks to the past as the other looks to the future. Thus, the year's start is traditionally the time to review and reflect on what's occurred, while making plans and resolutions for days ahead. Take stock... tie up loose ends and fill in the gaps... clear the decks and start afresh.

It occurred to me that some of us have not been properly introduced; when I re-started my usually-every-other-week column in September, it was after a nearly-two-year absence. During that time, *The Journal* broadened its geographic coverage and audience, and changed its name to reflect that expansion. Thus, there are likely many newer readers who only began reading the print version of *The Journal* after I began my extended hiatus.

So, some of you may have missed my various previous columns and multi-part essays on: fairer local taxation; better ballot methods; peak oil; the true histories of the Declaration of Independence, the Second Amendment, and the Pledge of Allegiance; improving representative democracy; responsible development vs. big box stores; and the downsides of casino gambling, among others.

As *The Journal* did not post any of these first 48 columns online at the time, they would all be at the bottom of bird cages by now, or recycled into toilet paper, and therefore beyond your ability to visit or revisit, were it not for my being able to post them to a convenient website archive myself.

So, I encourage new readers (or those wishing to re-read or reference a particular column or series) to catch up by going to <http://journal.kryolux.us> and getting what is, in effect, a totally-free and ever-expanding book on modern civics with historical context and analysis. Most of the essays are as relevant as when first published, I'm pleased to say.

In my first columns, written October 2006, I laid out their intention and scope: "I want to fill these columns with ideas, suggestions, examples, brainstorm, inspirations – even some flights of fancy – that can make our community a better place in which to live, work, and thrive... What I hope to do in future columns is show how these and other principles can be applied to problem-solving (or, better yet, problem-prevention) in our communities, so that we all become better at observing what is, and, then, coming up with ways to make things better."

When I wrote that, I was also serving as a Trustee on the *Ellenville Village Board*, so my purpose was not just academic, but to raise issues I felt were important to Ellenville and the surrounding communities. Previously, as editor of *Wawarsing.Net* (the *Ellenville-Wawarsing Chamber of Commerce's* monthly magazine), I had already brought some of these issues to the fore (also archived, at <http://wawarsing.net>).

I had also served as a county, state, and national rep to the *Green Party of the United States*, which explains the radical pro-democracy, pro-justice, pro-environmental positions I usually took; yet, as an entrepreneur, co-founding *Bio-Energy Systems, Inc.* (now *Besicorp*), I had hands-on experience in starting a company from scratch and bringing it to a multi-million-dollar public stock offering, as well as creating its communications and international marketing departments, hence my broader economic vision, and commitment to growing local businesses. (Which is why I began covering issues beyond Ellenville, even before *The Journal* began to widen its own net; I guess it just took some time for *The Journal* to offer the larger audience I was already writing for.)

And, as a frequent traveler, I've seen some of the best and worst examples of how large and small communities deal with *their* problems, and often brought back pictures and literature to show how *we* could do things better or more attractively.

I believe it to be uncontested that I have been the most prolific contributor to *The Journal's* online forum, where I often put down my first thoughts on a subject before polishing them for these columns (which means some online readers have only known me as that voluble curmudgeon constantly upbraiding "anonymous ciphers" for their nasty personal attacks that lack reasoned discourse). I'm gratified that my more recent columns have been posted online, and consistently generate the most reader response, which means I'm hitting some buttons or nerves. Good.

So, here's an update on some of the previous columns, tying up some loose ends, as it were –

#4 and #6: Big box stores, local zoning codes, and a Napanoch Walmart... As noted elsewhere, it's now up to an appeals court in Albany to decide if the points I made here, in the forum, at planning and town board meetings, on CNBC, and at <http://w-e-r-d.org>, have merit.

#7, #8, #9: Ellenville still needs a viable village square and park; the available options laid out in that series are still worth considering. Oh, and the faux brix in the current Liberty Square "renovation" are already cracking... see photos at <http://kryolux.us/fact/liberty/> (also the color version of my plan from my "BFD!" column).

#10: Ulster County ignored my plea to reject electronic vote scanners, though it did reject touch-screen direct recording electronic devices; fortunately, there are groups and court actions trying to return us to lever machines or go to hand-counted paper ballots, as I urged, ideally to be mailed in, as in Oregon and Washington state.

#11 and #12: Glad to see Assemblyman Cahill pushing to revamp school funding without relying on the inequity of property taxes. My columns went further, and suggested that most municipal taxes should be income-based, as some other states now do, rather than be property-based.

#13-#16: Peak Oil remains our greatest long-term threat, along with global climate chaos, both exacerbated by over-population beyond Earth's carrying capacity. Some of my predictions were off a tad, but the price of oil and gasoline are inching back up again, inexorably to the point of serious hardship for a complex civilization based on petroleum.

#17-#35, #41: I'm particularly proud of this extended series of essays on what used to be called "Civics" in school, which include perhaps the most comprehensive histories of the Pledge of Allegiance, Declaration of Independence, and Second Amendment available anywhere, as well as a detailed explanation of what the Founders meant when they established the US as a constitutional representative democracy.

#28-#32: As I predicted, the Supreme Court overturned two centuries of case law, and ignored history and legal language to pander to NRA pressure; if you read and comprehend my essays on "bearing arms," you will be more in-line with James Madison, and better-informed, than five clueless SCotUS justices and the cynical NRA pseudoscholars they depended on.

#35: Mayor Kaplan has dusted-off my idea to convert Ellenville from a village to a city, but I surmise this was mostly to tweak the Wawarsing leaders into conducting a property reval and not something he will actually pursue. And, even with the current audit kerfuffle, dissolution, per se, has gone back into hibernation for another decade or so.

#36: *The Journal* finally revamped its forum policy to disallow unregistered anonymous posters.

#42-#47: Still no local casinos, or likelihood. Amen.