

O P I N I O N



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK / Will Rowlands

Beyond the Pale

Some opponents of the Mahackeno Y seem to think the "debate" about the proposed new Family Y facility is a blood sport. The controversy no longer has any boundaries, everyone is fair game and innuendo is king.

Legitimate criticism and disagreement is natural and to be expected. Much of what we've seen lately, however, is little more than name-calling and personal attacks.

Almost nobody who has had the temerity not to agree with the Mahackeno Y's opponents, let alone actively disagree with them, has been spared their wrath:

- There have been calls for the Family Y's Board of Directors and Board of Trustees to resign. That's some 42 people, many of them long-time pillars of the community.
- The integrity of the Family Y's CEO was questioned.
- The first selectman is being attacked.
- The credentials of a Y consultant were questioned.

- The Westport town attorney has been attacked.
- The chairman of the P&Z is being attacked.
- The chairman of the Conservation Commission was attacked.
- Town Hall employees are being attacked.
- The *Westport News* has been criticized.
- The integrity of an RTMer has been questioned.
- The motives of a state senator have been questioned.
- The integrity of the operator of the Family Y's proposed FAST system was questioned.

That's just from memory. There are probably others.

I'd prefer to use a different word than "attacked" but nothing else really suffices. The first selectman is a "spectacular disgrace," the chairman of the P&Z is a "fascist," town hall employees are "morally corrupt" and the *Westport*

News is "biased" even though it hasn't even endorsed a Mahackeno Y.

Perhaps the most bizarre of all is the idea that there's some sort of vast conspiracy backing the Family Y.

Is such a thing possible? Not from where we sit. In our experience, Westporters think for themselves. Getting them to agree on much of anything would be like herding cats. That's a *good* thing.

What we see is people trying to do their job to the best of their ability under extremely trying circumstances. The ones who are paid for their trouble deserve danger pay. The ones that volunteer their time deserve our gratitude.

We hope nobody is swayed by conspiracy theories and personal attacks. We are better than that.

I *do* worry about the future of Westport. I worry about a time when nobody wants to sit on town boards and commissions unless they have an agenda to promote or an axe to grind. I worry that we

won't be able to convince people to work here because they will have heard about us and say, "Westport? I've heard about Westport. It's not worth the hassle."

Make no mistake. I love Westport. I grew up here and spent most of my life here. I, too, fear for our future but it's not a Family Y at Mahackeno that worries me, rather it's the shrill and brutish nature of our public discourse. It's the "squeaky wheel gets the grease" philosophy on steroids.

The "human" toll of this controversy is so high that it may have already exceeded any negative impact a Mahackeno Y might have on this community.

Friendships have been ruined. Some have been reduced to tears. The environment is highly toxic and unhealthy.

One thing is clear, slinging mud all over the place and hoping something sticks has caused a lot of collateral damage and has done little to further the debate and move the ball forward.