

For Immediate Release

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Think Globally, Act—and Vote—Locally

Writer/Community Organizer Enters Town Council Race Focused on the Big Issues While Aiming to Make Government Work for Working Families

JAY, NY—The only active candidate in Essex County endorsed by the Working Families Party of New York State is the son of an iron worker and a retail saleswoman, the first person in his direct family line to go to college, and a self-described progressive who cites influences on his political thinking ranging from the actions of Martin Luther King, Jr., to the musings of MSNBC's Keith Olbermann. By an odd quirk of timing, he also shares an important distinction with the current occupant of the White House.

But if there's one thing that distinguishes this person from the typical candidate for local office more than anything, it may be his commitment to the idea that town government can be put to work to benefit average working people precisely by coming up with solutions—at the local level—to some of the biggest problems of the day.

“The words, ‘Think globally, act locally,’ never had more meaning,” writes Fred Balzac in an open letter to Town of Jay residents posted on his website, www.fredbalzac.com. “Local concerns matter. While our new president and the federal government and New York State grapple with problems at the international, national, and state levels, we need a strong local

government that will be proactive and come up with creative solutions that benefit the great majority of town residents, especially middle- and working-class families and individuals who are struggling to make ends meet.”

Balzac is a candidate for Town Councilperson. The Democrat, who circulated an independent petition for the Progressive Party line along with a petition for the Working Families Party, is running an issues-oriented campaign summed up by his slogan, “Keep the Town of Jay beautiful—and *affordable!*”

Buy Local and Prosper

As Fred sees it, there are two major global issues directly impacting our standard of living at the local level and they are intertwined: the worldwide economic meltdown and climate change. His Number 1 goal, if elected, is to launch a “Buy Local” campaign to help local businesses survive and prosper and bring added value to Jay residents as consumers. He also wants to help the Town encourage new locally owned businesses to meet unmet needs not currently served by existing businesses in town and to investigate prospects for bringing back to the Ausable Valley region its own Chamber of Commerce.

On the environmental front, as Councilperson Balzac hopes to spark a town-wide conversation on the need for a comprehensive zoning plan—out of the concern, for example, that an outside developer could come into town with a big project that resulted in raising local property taxes. He also plans to help the Town of Jay—its people as well as the government—“go green” by looking into the possibilities for solar power and other forms of alternative energy.

“We’re not likely to strike oil here in the Town of Jay, but we can grow more of our own food and develop more locally produced goods and services that people in town and our neighboring

communities need,” Fred says. “By encouraging people to ‘Buy local,’ we can keep more of our disposable income circulating throughout town and back into the pockets of the people who live here—instead of California or Chile or China. And the conscious decision to buy locally has environmental benefits, in and of itself, and will help us create a sustainable future.”

“Don’t Mourn—Organize”

In addition to these issues, Balzac is stressing his qualifications for the Councilperson position, including communications and organizing skills honed from numerous volunteer efforts undertaken since moving to the North Country and Jay in 1992. He has 30 years of professional experience, most recently as a medical writer-editor working with such major healthcare corporations as Bayer and Pfizer.

His extensive volunteer activities include helping to create and launch the official Town of Jay website, including the first comprehensive Web listing of town businesses; serving on and chairing Essex County’s Occupancy Tax Committee; and stepping onto the board of JEMS (the Jay Entertainment & Music Society) at a critical phase of the group’s recent building project. Balzac was recently named to the Tahawus Lodge Center building project steering committee and has joined the Au Sable Forks Revitalization Group, both of which he views as profoundly important to the future of downtown Au Sable Forks and the entire Town of Jay.

Although he may be best known to many residents as the man who spearheaded local—and often controversial—efforts to save the historic Jay Covered Bridge (JCB) and protect the Jay rapids and swimming hole area, Balzac credits those achievements to the collective actions of many individuals and groups. Their combined efforts led to a multi-million-dollar Federal, state, and county project to restore the covered bridge, enhance the park area around the historic

wooden structure, and install a new bridge downstream of the JCB to meet the transportation and emergency-vehicle needs of the town—an issue Balzac and his fellow advocates spotlighted along with the historic, recreational, and environmental aspects.

“It shows what people can do when they commit themselves to get the facts, organize, and persevere even when the going gets tough,” Balzac says. “In the end, the town came together on the project—thanks to the extraordinary leadership of some of our locally elected officials.”

A Kinship with Barack

A motivating factor behind Balzac’s community organizing efforts has been a lifelong passion for politics—ever since he represented the presidential campaign of Hubert H. Humphrey in a class debate in fifth grade. More recently, he has volunteered for such Democratic presidential candidates as Paul Tsongas and Howard Dean. Inspired by the Campaign of Barack Obama, Balzac joined the Essex County Democratic Committee in October 2008, as one of four members representing the Town of Jay, and the county issues subcommittee he initiated helped encourage several local candidates throughout Essex County, including his own.

Balzac considers President Obama to be somewhat of a peer as well as an inspiring role model: the two men both graduated from Columbia University with the Columbia College Class of ’83. Although to his knowledge their paths never crossed—Obama transferred to Columbia for his junior and senior years, while Balzac entered the college with an earlier class—the Town Council candidate senses a kinship with the President.

“We both have a progressive outlook that’s tinged with pragmatism,” Balzac says. “I suspect it may stem from experiencing our politically formative years in the cauldron of Upper West

Side Manhattan radicalism at the dawn of the ultra-conservative Reagan era. I'm thankful that Obama is in the White House. I hope to bring the same positive progressive change that he's instituting across America to the working families of the Town of Jay."

To learn more about Balzac's vision and goals for the town, visit www.fredbalzac.com.

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