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## Hornbeck defends APA nod

By MIKE LYNCH, Enterprise Outdoors Writer

OLMSTEDVILLE - In a recent Interview with the Enterprise, Olmstedville boatmaker Peter Hornbeck defended himself as being more than just an environmentalist, pointing to the success he's had as a businessman in the Adirondack Park over the last few decades.

Hornbeck is currently under consideration for an in-Park seat on the state Adirondack Park Agency's Board of Commissioners. His appointment has received criticism from local governments but also strong support from the governor's office.

"I can understand the need for balance in the APA, and I think I can bring balance because I'm not a doctrine environmentalist," Hornbeck said. "I have other interests. I spent probably 5 percent of my time in environmental matters and the other 95 percent of my time in business matters."

For the last several decades, Hornbeck has made a living selling lightweight boats to people who want to enjoy the Adirondack Park Forest Preserve and other wilderness waterways through the U.S. His small business is located in Olmstedville, located in the town of Minerva, and employs about six people, depending upon what time of year it is. Hornbeck said he sells roughly 400 boats annually.

That success has helped his already strong appreciation for the natural environment grow even stronger. He firmly believes that his business is tied to the Forest Preserve.

"From a paddle-sport perspective, the more the Forest Preserve is protected, the better the paddle-sport industry is going to be," Hornbeck said.

Hornbeck received the support of environmentalists when he was nominated this winter to replace APA commissioner and Lake Placid businessman Art Lussi, whose family owns the Crowne Plaza Resort and Golf Club.

But the nomination was opposed by many of the Park's local government leaders because of Hornbeck's role as an environmentalist. Hornbeck is a former chairman of the Residents' Committee to the Protect the Adirondacks and current member of Protect the Adirondacks! board. The latter group is currently suing the APA over the Adirondack Club and Resort, a proposed 600-home resort in Tupper Lake.

In order to be confirmed, Hornbeck still needs to be approved by the Senate's Finance Committee, where it is currently stalled. Sen. Betty Little, R-Queensbury, who supports Lussi over Hornbeck, has reported that Hornbeck does not have the Finance Committee's support. If his nomination passes the Finance Committee, it would go to the full Senate. Hornbeck has

already made it through the Senate's Environmental Committee despite strong opposition from Little, who serves on that committee.

"I just thought he was not a good choice for an in-the-Park commissioner," Little said. "And it wasn't just me. I got resolutions and letters and phone calls from Franklin County and the ARISE (Adirondack Residents Intent on Saving the Economy) group, from the Association of Adirondack Towns and Villages, many of those groups."

Little cited Hornbeck's opposition to the Adirondack Club and Resort project and his ties to the environmental organizations as reasons he shouldn't be confirmed.

Little said in-Park commissioners need to provide a balance "between the environment and the economics."

But those who support Hornbeck say that is exactly why he should be confirmed. He's thrived as a businessman in the Adirondack Park, where many others have failed.

Minerva town Supervisor Sue Montgomery-Corey said the town is very excited about his nomination.

"Pete is a valued part of our business community, and so we've known him a long time, and we think he represents a lot of the small businesses throughout the Park," Montgomery-Corey said. "It's something like 63 percent of the businesses in the Park are microenterprises with five or fewer employees, and Pete's one of those one. As someone who also has a microenterprise, I appreciate the effort it takes to be successful with a small business in a rural area."

But those in Tupper Lake haven't been swayed, even if the chamber of commerce advertises Tupper Lake as being in the heart to the "Ten Rivers Region," a campaign that lends itself toward paddlers. It's Hornbeck's opposition to the Club and Resort that has them troubled.

"I don't know Peter Hornbeck myself, but I am aware of his affiliation with what I believe now is Protect the Adirondacks! and that does trouble us somewhat, especially considering that the Adirondack Park Agency does have an application for something he has stood against in a public forum," said Tupper Lake Chamber Director Marti Mozdzier. "Not knowing the individual at all, it makes it hard to judge, but I do see his documented stance that he has made, and I'm not confident that would really be a good choice at the moment."

But Hornbeck said that he would simply stay out of Adirondack Club and Resort proceedings. He defends himself by saying the lawsuit is focused on APA procedures.

"On that specific development, I would have to recuse myself," Hornbeck said. "Other large developments, it would be a case that if they followed the rules and regulations and the laws and whatnot, have at it. Everything is in place. I've had the opportunity to develop a business, and I don't want to prohibit other people as long as they stay within the guidelines as I have had to do. I'm not anti-business. I think that's why people wanted me to be an APA commissioner because I can see both sides."

Hornbeck said other commissioners have been parties to lawsuits.

"I don't know how many people have sued the Adirondack Park Agency, but a lot," Hornbeck said. "Certainly, current commissioners have sued the Adirondack Park Agency."

As examples, he pointed to Fred Monroe, Local Government Review Board executive director and a nonvoting member of the APA board, and some town supervisors, though he wasn't specific. In recent years, APA commissioner Frank Mezzano has often recused himself from discussions over certain regulatory revision discussions and votes. He was a member of the Hamilton County Board of Supervisors when it sued the APA over its shoreline setback regulations.

Monroe, supervisor of Minerva's neighboring town of Chestertown, is friends with Hornbeck and "thinks he's a good guy." His nephew also works for Hornbeck. But he has objections because of Hornbeck's environmental ties, especially because of the current APA board's makeup. The board currently has three former Adirondack Council board members: APA Chairman Curt Stiles, Richard Booth and Cecil Wray.

"If he was the only one on the Park Agency from an environmental group, I'm not sure we'd have any objection," said Monroe. "I'm pretty sure we wouldn't have any objection if he was one of the out-of-the-Park commissioner because you expect them to be from that kind of background, but when there's already three on the agency and he would be the fourth environmental advocacy commissioner, and really the second one out of five that is supposed to represent the residents, that's what we have the concern with."

But Montgomery-Corey said the argument pitting environmentalist versus businesses does a disservice to both Lussi and Hornbeck because the issue has more depth than that.

"I think it also does a disservice to the communities of the Adirondacks, to the people of the Adirondacks, because the way it's been portrayed, this is a fight between the businessman and the environmentalists," Montgomery-Corey said. "Well, Pete's a businessman, and in fact, in our community, he has created five living-wage jobs. His employees have benefits. His folks have been with him for years. So to paint him as this environmentalist who doesn't care about what it takes to make a business work here in the Park, I think does a disservice to everyone."

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