

**\$100 restaurant gift certificate giveaway**  
**NOW – MARCH 31**



**Upload your resume here!**

**BuffaloJobFinder.com**

In partnership with  
**YAHOO! hotjobs**

**THE BUFFALO NEWS**

**PRINT THIS**

Updated: 03/08/09 02:56 PM

## Gaughan's campaign turns to petitions

### *Downsizing effort goes door-to-door*

By Niki Cervantes  
 NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Kevin Gaughan, the citizen activist, failed with the politicians. Now he's taking his campaign to downsize local government directly to a big segment of suburban Erie County.

Gaughan said this weekend he and a small army of 200 volunteers are going door-to-door with petitions that call for public votes to shrink four town boards as well as abolish an entire village government.

New York needs less government, he said, and the petitions are one step in that direction.

"People are struggling now. They want change," Gaughan said. "I've found a way to arm people to achieve it."

It won't be easy. Elected officials hadn't even seen the petitions when they started lambasting them as misleading.

In fact, the supervisor of Erie County's largest suburb urged residents not to sign.

"You are being hoodwinked," Amherst Supervisor Satish Mohan said.

The petitions ask for public votes on eliminating two members each from the town boards of Amherst, Cheektowaga, West Seneca and Evans.

Meanwhile, signatures are being collected in Blasdell to abolish that village.

If successful, the five separate referendums would go to voters in the targeted localities in either May or June, Gaughan said.

An estimated 85 volunteers are fanning out in Cheektowaga to get signatures this weekend, with another 50 in Amherst, 70 in West Seneca, 40 in Evans and 22 in Blasdell, he said.

**\$100 restaurant gift certificate giveaway**  
**NOW – MARCH 31**

**Upload your resume here!**

**BuffaloJobFinder.com**  
 In partnership with  
**YAHOO! hotjobs**

The required number of signatures varies. Under state law, signatures totaling 5 percent of the voters in the last gubernatorial election are required to get the measures on the ballots. But Gaughan said volunteers plan to get signatures totaling 10 percent of the populations of each of the four towns.

In Blasdell, signatures from a third of the registered voters is required.

The petition drive follows Gaughan's mostly unsuccessful three-year crusade to persuade town boards to take the initiative and downsize. Of the 25 towns, 16 villages and three cities in Erie County that Gaughan solicited, only the Village of Lancaster downsized from seven members to five after putting the measure to a public vote last year. It passed with 90 percent of the vote.

West Seneca voters also signed petitions to force a referendum, but opponents went to court and successfully thwarted it.

Gaughan said he learned from that defeat how to word the petitions so that legal challenges will be significantly harder. He predicted politicians won't interfere.

Those "who try to interfere with the voice of the people do so at their own peril," he said.

But politicians were indeed already expressing displeasure.

Mohan said Amherst residents would be misled by the petitions.

"They will sign the petitions because they think they are downsizing government, but they're not," Mohan said. "Government [in Amherst] is 1,223 well-paid employees, not a seven-member . . . board."

Mohan said he is now creating his own list of changes in town government that will save "millions of dollars."

And in Evans, Supervisor Francis J. Pordum called Gaughan's downsizing drive "a very simplistic approach to savings in government."

The board there has five members. Each council member receives \$15,000, plus the option of receiving a \$6,000-a-year health policy for an individual or a \$15,000 policy for a family.

"That's not going to save the public a lot," he said, "and they'll have two less people to represent them."

Blasdell Mayor Ernest J. Jewett did not return a call to comment.

But Cheektowaga Council Member Charles Markel, who voted against a town board downsizing motion, said he would stand aside this time around to see what the public wants.

"Whatever the taxpayers want, that's fine with me," he said.

Pordum seemed resigned to the situation.

"If people want fewer representatives, that's what they'll get," he said. "But sometimes less is not better."

[ncervantes@buffnews.com](mailto:ncervantes@buffnews.com)

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/story/600869.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

2008 The Buffalo News.