



'He was worth every penny' 'Sand-a Claus' lobbyist earns praise from beach towns

By Victor Tine
Staff writer

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Washington lobbyist Howard Marlowe's clients seem to feel that his fees are money well spent.

A Daily News survey of administrators in five of the 34 cities and towns that retain the services of Marlowe & Co. showed unanimous satisfaction with the results obtained by the lobbying firm in various projects — including beach replenishment. (Marlowe also lists 18 other clients, either counties or nonprofit entities.)

"He was worth every penny," said former Venice, Fla., City Manager George Hunt, who worked with Marlowe for 12 years, beginning in the early 1990s.

"I can't speak enough about the good things Howard did for Venice," said Hunt, who is now human resources director in Palm Bay, Fla. "His contract was meager and the return on investment was considerable."

A group of Plum Island homeowners had asked Newbury and Newburyport to put up a total of \$36,000 — \$18,000 each — toward Marlowe's \$40,000 annual fee to hire the company for assistance in getting federal money to replenish the beach and repair the jetty at the northern tip of the island. The homeowners had raised another \$4,000 privately.

Local officials have decided that they would rather count on the region's congressional delegation to get the beach fixed than pay tax money to a lobbyist.

The Newbury Board of Selectmen withdrew a request that the Finance Committee put up \$10,000 from the Reserve Fund to pay for Marlowe's services in the current fiscal year. The Finance Committee postponed action on the original request on Feb. 19, after a member of the homeowners' group said it was launching a private fundraising campaign and might not need the funds.

Newburyport Mayor John Moak declined to bring a request for a financial transfer to the City Council to pay the share requested from the city. Several councilors were opposed to spending money on a lobbyist.

The homeowners group has since formed the nonprofit Plum Island Foundation to raise and manage beach replenishment funds. Marlowe has started working on behalf of the foundation to get appropriations requests into the hands of the appropriate congressional staffers.

Neither Newbury nor Newburyport has employed lobbying services in the past. Since the homeowners first went public in late November with the proposal to hire Marlowe, questions have been raised about what a lobbyist could do for the communities that their own congressional delegation could not.

Judging from the responses of municipal officials in New York, North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida, the answer seems to be a lot.

East Hampton, N.Y., at the eastern end of Long Island, has been working with Marlowe & Co. for about 16 months,

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according to Lynn Ryan, executive assistant to Town Supervisor William McGintee.

She said with Marlowe & Co.'s help, the town had obtained \$4.3 million in federal funding for projects in the current fiscal year and has a similar amount requested for next fiscal year.

"They work through our senators and representatives," she said of Marlowe staffers. "They're extremely knowledgeable about these projects. They know which documents you're supposed to file. When we hired them, everything got to where it was supposed to go. Before, we were getting nothing, zip."

Tom Hogg and Michael Moore are the town managers in the neighboring communities of Topsail Beach and Surf City, both on Topsail Island on the south coast of North Carolina. Together with the town of North Topsail Beach, the communities have retained Marlowe & Co. as a group for the past four years.

Hogg said Topsail Beach has just undergone a \$1.5 million beach replenishment with Marlowe's help.

Moore said one of Marlowe's strengths is "getting folks to understand your beach erosion problem."

The three towns split Marlowe's \$50,000 fee, Hogg said.

John MacLean was city manager in Venice, Fla., when the Gulf Coast municipality hired Marlowe to work with the local congressional delegation on what was ultimately a successful beach replenishment project under MacLean's successor, George Hunt.

"Your congressional delegation can do a lot, but I think we found was that there were a lot of contacts that had to be made and it's unrealistic to expect your congressman to do all that," said MacLean, now the city manager in Keene, N.H.

City Manager Tom Leath of Myrtle Beach, a popular South Carolina resort community, a relatively recent Marlowe client, said lobbyists supplement the effort of local congressional staffers in couple of key ways.

"What lobbyists can do that your local congressman can't do is make sure all the deadlines are met if you're going after grants or earmarks," Leath said. "Lobbyists do their best to make sure that the right staff person has the right document to back up your argument. They deal with congressional people who are not from your district, but who you need to know about your argument."

Elected officials with many constituencies to represent can't focus on any single project, Leath said, so communities have to pay lobbyists to keep track of things.

"It's a shame you have to do that, but you have to do that," he said.

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