

July 17, 2013

State Treasurer Visits Irene Repair Project in Pownal

by Patrick McArdle

POWNAL — A pond that's used to protect the town by supplying water needed by the Pownal Fire Department in an emergency is back in service after Tropical Storm Irene.

"Vermonters work together and when smart, good people work together, great things get done and this is an example of it. I'm so impressed and pleased that we could help," State Treasurer Beth Pearce said Tuesday at the Schoolhouse Street pond.

The man-made pond, which is just past the Pownal Elementary School, became too polluted with silt and debris after Tropical Storm Irene in August 2011 to be useful to the fire department as a water source.

Rep. Bill Botzow, D-Pownal, pointed out the pond was important because it was in a section of town that was not part of one of the fire districts so it's not served by hydrants.

Finding a way to fund important projects that provide community benefits like fire safety is important in a state like Vermont, according to Botzow.

"Basic strategies like this, use what you have, don't go too far, do a good job with it, go ahead when you can and then things come through," he said.

Botzow said Pearce helped out Pownal when she noted that as treasurer, she could disburse federal Title III money for a public safety project. She was able to get \$11,000 to Pownal to repair the pond and about \$14,000 to the Bennington Rescue Squad to replace equipment that was lost while squad members responded to Irene-related emergencies.

For the particular projects, which also included about \$9,100 to relocate the emergency command center in Jamaica and about \$74,000 to replace forest roads in Ripton, the money was available because the towns are home to Green Mountain National Forest land. The money from the Secure Rural Schools Act funds could only be used for fire safety and emergency response projects.

Pearce said the state was assisted in getting the money by what she called the "best congressional delegation in the country" and the Vermont League of Cities and Towns.

The money was provided in response to a request from the Select Board. Chairman Steve Kauppi said that as a former member of the fire department, he was happy to take the proposal, which was submitted on behalf of the Pownal Valley Fire Department by Safety Officer Jason Olansky, and send it to the state.

"Anything we can do to make their lives easier, their work responding to emergencies easier for them, certainly is beneficial to all of us. We have probably the greatest volunteers in the state," he said.

Olansky said while the quality of volunteers remains high, there aren't as many as there once were.

"Times have changed over the years. We see the brunt of low manpower in town here. We don't have the resources, the manpower we had years ago where they could go out and dam up any stream (with) portable pumps. Nowadays, we're lucky to have the one person and the one driver of the truck," he said.

With the pond repairs, using it as a water source isn't a one-man operation but it can be done with only a few people, Olansky said. The repairs, which were finished in November, should also keep the pond in use for years to come and also has an emergency spillway in the event of future flooding.

Several people at the event Tuesday said they appreciated the cooperation of the family that owns the land on which the pond is located. When it was built, the land belonged to Floyd Patterson, a former fire chief, and the land still belongs to the Patterson family.