

Huntington Residents Win Free Septic Systems

19 Suffolk homeowners to join a county-wide pilot program to reduce nitrogen levels.

By **Adina Genn (Patch Staff)**

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A Huntington couple received a free septic system as part of a pilot-program to help reduce nitrogen contamination in Suffolk County's water supply.

Jeanne and Gustavo Sawicki were the winners in the district served by Leg. William Spencer, D-Centerport.

In total, 19 homeowners were chosen by lottery on Monday at a general meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature. More than 130 Suffolk residents applied to participate in the septic lottery. The applicants were vetted to ensure they met the required criteria for installation of the advanced wastewater treatment systems.

The advanced wastewater treatment systems, which were donated by four national manufacturers, are valued at up to \$15,000 per system, officials said.

“This initiative represents a significant step in improving the quality of water, an important resource for economy and health,” said County Executive Steve Bellone, who has deemed water supply protection and improvement his top priority.

“This pilot program will demonstrate the benefits of protecting one of our great natural resources and will provide individual homeowners as well as the rest of Suffolk County an opportunity to improve both the environment of their homes as well as that of Suffolk County,” he added.

Fifteen legislators drew the names of winners from their district; three legislators who did not have applicants from their district drew three other names and Bellone drew one.

The pilot program is part of Suffolk County’s “Reclaim Our Water” initiative, which aims to improve the county’s water quality, restore the region’s natural storm barriers by eradicating nitrogen pollution by sewerage targeted areas and implementing advanced on-site wastewater treatment systems.

The program will test systems in different types of terrain so that they can be permitted for general use within the county, officials say. Many of these advanced wastewater treatment systems were observed by county experts on a tour of septic programs in other states in the Northeast.

“Suffolk County has more than 360,000 unsewered homes, creating excess and unhealthy amounts of nitrogen in the ground due to failing, unmaintained and excessive loadings from septic systems and cesspools,” Bellone said.

“Advanced wastewater treatment systems for homeowners are a vital part of the solution to our water quality crisis,” he added. “While this is not the single solution, this is one of the initiatives we are doing to reclaim our water here in Suffolk County.”

The septic systems are expected to be installed by April 2015. Homeowners will receive free installation, monitoring and maintenance for five years.

The 19 systems were donated by four national manufacturers – BUSSE Green Technologies, Norweco, Orenco Systems and Hydro-Action Industries. Officials say these manufacturers have extensive experience in the United States and Europe in removing excess nitrogen from residential and commercial properties.

The firms will also with Suffolk County officials and the County’s Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs throughout the process to develop an extensive job training program to bring more septic and wastewater-oriented employment opportunities to Suffolk County. The program will also help to create a homeowner awareness program to provide residents information on proper septic system maintenance to help reduce nitrogen levels.

Several organizations, including the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Peconic Green Growth, Nature Conservancy, the Peconic Estuary Program and the Suffolk County Planning Commission assisted in the outreach to homeowners.

For more information on Suffolk County’s septic demonstration program, as well as the detailed report on its septic tour, visit www.suffolkcountyny.gov.