

Independent Perspective #1874

Meet the Candidates discussion with Todd Vaarwerk

## Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:00:06 Speaker 1

Our guest today is Todd Vaarwerk, Chief Policy Officer of Western New York Independent Living.

00:00:11 Speaker 1

And I'm your host, Ernie Churchwell.

00:00:13 Speaker 1

Welcome to the program, Todd.

00:00:15 Speaker 2

Always good to be here.

00:00:17 Speaker 1

It's our pleasure to have you.

00:00:19 Speaker 1

And we have a big annual event occurring at all three of our major locations.

00:00:26 Speaker 1

And I imagine you can sketch out the general look of things if you'd be so kind.

00:00:36 Speaker 2

Perfect.

00:00:36 Speaker 2

An important part of our job as an independent living center is to help people exercise their rights as a citizen, which includes the right to vote.

00:00:46 Speaker 2

So, in order to exercise your right to vote smartly, you need to be an informed constituent.

00:00:53 Speaker 2

And so, to help you out with that, every year

00:00:56 Speaker 2

at our locations, we have a Meet the Candidates Day for people that are running for elections that come up in any given year.

00:01:05 Speaker 2

2025 is a local election year.

00:01:09 Speaker 2

So, you're looking at local races like comptroller, county legislator, mayor or supervisor, coroner in some locations.

00:01:23 Speaker 2

Right.

00:01:24 Speaker 2

We get a list from our local boards of elections.

00:01:27 Speaker 2

We kind of figure out what the major races are, and we invite people to come to our center to talk about what they know and what they want to know about people with disabilities.

00:01:40 Speaker 1

And for the convenience of our consumers.

00:01:44 Speaker 1

It's being held at 3 different locations in Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Batavia.

00:01:51 Speaker 2

If you could, Buffalo

00:01:53 Speaker 2

is October the 15th from 2 to 5 at our offices at 3108 Main Street.

00:01:59 Speaker 2

ILNC in Niagara Falls is the 22nd of October from 1 p.m.

00:02:06 Speaker 2

to 4 p.m.

00:02:06 Speaker 2

at those offices on Portage Road in the Haberly Plaza.

00:02:11 Speaker 2

And ILGR is the 21st of October from 11 to 1 in their offices in Batavia on Main Street.

00:02:20 Speaker 1

And if you could remind people what ILNC and ILGR stand for?

00:02:25 Speaker 2

Independent Living of Niagara County and Independent Living of the Genesee Region.

00:02:29 Speaker 1

Terrific.

00:02:30 Speaker 1

And people are encouraged to come to those locations in person.

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But if disability or other circumstance prevents that, I guess there's also a virtual attendant.

00:02:45 Speaker 1

option.

00:02:45 Speaker 2

Absolutely.

00:02:46 Speaker 2

And in addition, if for some reason you can't come on that day, but you're worried about a particular candidate, we record this stuff and we put it up on our YouTube channel.

00:02:56 Speaker 2

But I always encourage people with disabilities, when possible, to attend in person.

00:03:01 Speaker 2

You get to know the most about a candidate when you're standing in the same room with them.

00:03:05 Speaker 1

Plus, it helps convince the candidate that they have a goodly number of constituents with disabilities that they have to pay attention to when election ends, even more

00:03:15 Speaker 1

coming into office is absolutely, Ernie.

00:03:18 Speaker 1

And as we record this, it's still a couple of weeks before the first of the Meet the Candidates days.

00:03:25 Speaker 1

But I imagine people, if they want to find out about the particular attendees, can probably contact their local offices closer to the date.

00:03:35 Speaker 2

They absolutely can.

00:03:37 Speaker 2

You can call my office at 716-836-0822, extension 101.

00:03:44 Speaker 2

or e-mail me at TV, as in Victor, A-A-R-W-E-R-K at wnyil.org, and I can pass you out to the particular person at the other locations if you need to know.

00:03:57 Speaker 1

Sounds like that can't beat that was a stick, as the saying goes.

00:04:02 Speaker 1

Anything else that you'd like to mention to encourage people to come?

00:04:07 Speaker 2

Actually, a lot of people say

00:04:09 Speaker 2

local election years aren't important, right?

00:04:13 Speaker 2

It's not as important as, say, the next federal election, which happens in 26.

00:04:18 Speaker 2

I say Pasha to that because the local elections are the starting ground for lifelong politicians.

00:04:25 Speaker 2

So, the people that are taking these positions now are likely to be the leaders that are going to be taking more important positions into the future.

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So, getting to know them now is

00:04:36 Speaker 2

always a good thing as opposed to waiting until they're running for something really big.

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Todd, we're totally out of time.

00:04:42 Speaker 1

You've already given your contact information.

00:04:44 Speaker 1

Thank you so much for being with us.

00:04:46 Speaker 2

Always a pleasure.

00:04:47 Speaker 1

You've been listening to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:04:53 Speaker 1

Our guest today was Todd Vaarwerk, Chief Policy Officer of Western New York Independent Living.

00:04:58 Speaker 1

And I've been your host, Ernie Churchwell.