**FAST CHAT** 

## Taking the helm at Cornell

BY TIM KELLY | STAFF WRITER

He worked for the county health department for 37 1/2 years, the last 10 as director of the Divi-

sion of Environmental Quality. But only five days after his April 2 retirement, Vito Minei is back behind a desk, this time as the new director of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, an amalgam of programs including agriculture, water quality, health and youth activities.

He takes the reins at the Riverhead-based extension, which employs close to 200 people, after a career that included 18 years as head of the Peconic Estuary Program. As chief of the Office of Ecology and later director of the Division of Environmental Quality, Mr. Minei was the health department's point man on following and investigating the

spread of the brown tide algae, which first appeared in the Peconics in 1986. He fills the seat that Dale Moyer of Mattituck held on an interim basis.

## Q: What is the biggest challenge Cornell Cooperative **Extension currently faces?**

**A:** The economy. We took some funding hits and my immediate challenge is to make sure that we can continue to keep these valuable projects going.

### Q: Why take the director's job after such a long career with the health department?

A: I was planning to retire this spring and assumed I would go into the consulting business. But when I saw extension's recruitment announcement back in October I pursued it from there. The timing happened to work out perfectly. It's public service and it's multifaceted. I was interested in the fact that it's more than an environmental program. The youth development programs here really excited me and

that's one of the reasons why I came here. Then there's the Cornell connection. If you're going to get involved with a science-based organization, there aren't too many more nationally renowned than Cornell University.

> Q: With extensive background and experience in water quality issues, how do you reconcile that with your new responsibilities for CCE's agricultural program?

A: I never saw agriculture and environmental quality as mutually exclusive. I always thought they could go hand in hand and that we could do away with what for decades seemed to be a very contentious relationship between regulators and the farming industry. I know how much agriculture meant to the East End and the vitality of its economy. Coming from the county health department, it's my respon-

sibility to build on the relationships I had with Long Island Farm Bureau executive director Joe Gergela and Dale Mover on the sustainability of agriculture, both environmentally and economically.

### Q: What do you hope to accomplish in your first days as director?

A: Cooperative Extension operates the County Farm in Yaphank, which combines the concepts of maintaining a working farm with offering educational programs for kids. The staff is in a temporary building from the '60s and the road is a series of potholes that looks like the road to Kabul, Afghanistan, after an American bombing run. My initial goal is to try to reach out to people I know in the building industries to help refurbish that.

I'd also like to get more kids interested in science.

tkelly@timesreview.com

# Library still dealing with flood damage

Riverhead Free Library has been forced to cancel or relocate many of its programs as it continues to cope with flood damage from last month's rainstorm.

Some programs have been moved to the senior center in Aquebogue, Cornell Cooperative Extension on Griffing Avenue or other areas in the library, such as the children's center.

'We're sort of making it work, little by little," Ms. Jacobs said. "The hard part is that we don't know when it's going to be fixed ... we don't know yet if we're going to get any coverage from our insurance company."

At its worst, about three to four inches of water filled the basement, which houses two meeting rooms, a staff lounge and space for art exhibits, said library director Lisa Jacobs.

"We basically had standing water for about three or four days during the height of the storm, the week of March 29," she said.

"We were just pumping, pumping, pumping, and not winning the battle," Ms. Jacobs said. The cleaning company ServPro, she added, "has come in and taken out all the carpets and taken out sheetrock and insulation."

The library underwent a \$4.6 million renovation about 10 years ago.

Library officials are urging patrons to call 727-3228 and press '0' for the public information desk to find out which programs are still running and where.

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