

## Septic Lottery Winners' Names Are Drawn

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It's probably not the first "wish list" item to come to mind this time of year—but no matter.

Philip Smyth of Remsenburg won the lottery on Monday, December 15—a drawing at a meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature for one of 19 free state-of-the-art septic systems worth as much as \$15,000 apiece.

The giveaway is part of a pilot program to improve water quality by stemming pollution from outdated septic systems. More than 130 homeowners applied, yet only one of the 19 winners came from the easternmost district, on whose behalf County Legislator Jay Schneiderman drew Mr. Smyth's name on December 15.

"It's not just an abstract interest for our family," Mr. Smyth said two days later, explaining that he and his wife, Kristen, and sons, 12-year-old Henry and 10-year-old Arthur, enjoy sailing and fishing and the outdoors, and have the bay right at the end of their road. "So when this came up, I was really excited to be able to participate," he said. "I thought, I really want to support this and make it happen."

The Smyths' home was built in 1968—basically, a typical Long Island ranch, with a second-floor bedroom—and has what Mr. Smyth described as “a regular old septic tank.” The original owner had worked for Grumman, and Mr. Smyth, a financial consultant, bought the home with his family several years ago.

The pilot program is part of a county initiative to reduce nitrogen pollution by sewerage certain areas and using advanced individual on-site septic systems in others. Based on a highly successful program in Rhode Island, the program the Smyths are taking part in will test the 19 donated systems in different types of terrain so they can be permitted for general use.

“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,” County Executive Steve Bellone said in a press release. “Advanced wastewater treatment systems for homeowners are a vital part of the solution to our water quality crisis.”

The septic systems for homeowners like the Smyths are expected to be installed in the spring. Homeowners will receive free installation as well as monitoring and maintenance for five years.

“We’re the septic tank capital of the world, so it makes sense for the solution to really come out of Long Island,” Mr. Smyth said, adding that if it was possible to build the Lunar Module, clean septic technology ought to be entirely possible.

“Ordinarily, you’d say this is sort of just hokey,” said Mr. Smyth, who filled out an online application and took part in a telephone interview to qualify for the lottery. “The glamour is to get our bays back to where they’re productive and aren’t the color of a cup of coffee.”