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Water-conscious Mattituck resident wins septic lottery

by [Carrie Miller](#) | 12/19/2014 8:00 AM |



Mattituck resident Thomas Pileski. (Credit: Carrie Miller)

Whether it's his "Fish On" bumper sticker, the flounder-shaped welcome mat or the picture of a bayman at work that hangs next to his dinner table, it's safe to say Thomas Pileski of Mattituck spends a lot of time on the water.

That's the reason he's stayed in tune with water quality issues that are plaguing area estuaries — the very same waters where he grew up clamming and scalloping with his father and he now enjoys fishing with his three sons.

On Monday, Mr. Pileski, 55, was among 19 homeowners chosen to receive free advanced wastewater treatment systems — valued at up to \$15,000 each. The selection puts his household

among the first in Suffolk County that will participate in an effort to reduce nitrogen contamination flowing into groundwater.

“I saw [the lottery] on the news and I figured why not apply,” Mr. Pileski said after getting word of his unique prize. “I thought, anything I can do to help the next generation and keep the waters healthy.”

The systems are designed to remove about half the nitrogen that enters groundwater from conventional cesspools. They are the same types of advanced systems that could become mandated for use by at least some — and maybe one day all — East End homeowners.

Should that be the case, Mr. Pileski stands to have saved a pretty penny, as the systems are an expense he knows could pose financial hardship for the average homeowner.

“At that kind of price, it absolutely is,” he said. “I mean, I am a single parent, so it’s tough. I have my own bills and I also help my sons when they need a little support.”

Four different manufacturers have donated the 19 systems and will pay for installation as well as maintenance costs for the first five years.

The winning homeowners will be responsible for the cost of electricity to run the systems, which are expected to range from \$5 to \$20 a month, county officials have said.

Through the pilot program, county health department officials will determine which systems have the greatest impact on improving water quality, as some systems may work better than others in different areas.

While testing the systems’ efficiency, officials from the county’s department of labor, licensing and consumer affairs will develop “an extensive job training program to bring more septic and wastewater-oriented employment opportunities to Suffolk County,” according to a release about the program.

The majority of the systems being tested are already in use in a number of Northeastern states, which Mr. Pileski said eased any fears about taking part of the countywide study.

Suffolk County Executive Steven Bellone called such denitrification systems “a vital part of the solution to our water quality crisis.”

“While this is not the single solution, this is one of the initiatives we are doing to reclaim our water here in Suffolk County,” he said.

More than 130 homeowners applied for the chance to win one of the systems. County Legislator Al Krupski (D-Cutchogue) picked Mr. Pileski’s winning ticket for his district, noting that “Suffolk County is entering the modern era of wastewater treatment.”

Mr. Pileski said he is awaiting word of when the system will be installed.

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