Zoppo-Sassu: Democratic candidate for mayor

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Bristol and neighboring towns, they work and be entertained. I applaud the hospital’s community cool downtown remains big and vibrant, and working downtown, so existing and new business can have a base from which to thrive. We need a mayor that can execute and lead from this cool downtown. The community has for economic development. The mayor’s seat. What do you think his biggest criti- cism of you is? And how would you counter that criticism?

My opponent tells everyone that I’m on record as saying residents of Bristol don’t pay enough in taxes. Despite my opponent’s tax form over substance, never mind ethically challenged. I would put the city in a bad light. In election years he moves a little dirt around to give the illusion of progress and attains a lot of ribbon cuttings so he gets his pic- ture taken. Motion and stat- ics is not progress. Manipulation of crime, job creation, and unemploy- ment rate data – and then taking credit for it and putting it on a billboard. It’s ridiculous. Nothing he has done is sustainable or has long term value. Bristol is a strong mayor form of government. This is a job, not a performance art. The complete lack of a strategic plan leaves us susceptible to the worst of the larger taxpayers and employers continue to face challenges. While we’ve landed some small busi- nesses we’ve also lost some mid-sized ones. We need to have a strategy to attract all levels. We have no insurance policy against a major loss. A well-defined strategic plan would put us on the down- side “what ifs” is badly needed.

The city also has no strategy for restaurants—they live and die on their own. Other communities can be a much better job on promot- ing restaurants because they tend to be the heart of economic development.

Finally there is an issue you have not been asked about that you feel is vital to voters: tax and how would you address it? There are many issues that need to be addressed. The lack of accountability in financial matters like his refusal to account for code enforce- ment and demolition expenses, no bid contract- ing, and no plan for re-use and restoration of these code properties. His own spending, which included renovating and soundproof- ing his office, as well as his poor attendance record at commission meetings he is supposed to be chairing (and thus leading). Also, the complete lack of interest in the opioid public health cri- sis and its impact on Bristol families and businesses, as well as how we are responding to and delivering serv- ices. I have issued platform pieces on all of the above, www.zoppozassu.com

By Lisa Caporiano Staff Writer

Bristol — Soon, people with autism soon will have an opportunity to learn social and pragmatic skills through a program beginning at the first time.

Later this month, the Movia Robotics pilot pro- gram will kick off at Stafford School in Bristol, a school where two classrooms will take in 20 to 30 minutes lessons in small group set- tings for two times a week over a two-month period.

Established five years ago as a research and devel- opment entity, Movia is the first company to use robots and interactive software to teach academic, behavioral, and life skills to children with autism.

A creator from Movia will work with teachers and service staff to identify common needs among students. Through engagement with the Movia robot, students will work on building their pragmatic communication skills, mindfulness, as well as a connection to liter- acy.

Director of Special Services Dr. Michael Dietter said the program marks an exciting way to start some- thing unique that enhances what the district already provides to students.

“We’re looking to com- pliment our existing resources and our existing platform,” said Dietter. “It is meant to enhance the effec- tiveness of the service provider in a way that engages the student, and it’s inclusive.”

Recently, the Board of Education accepted grant funding the district received from Barnes Group, Main Street Community Foundation and the Stocker Foundation.

Once the pilot program is completed, Dietter said the first step is to start the program on a small scale to determine whether to expand it.

“Although we’ve target- ed cohorts who have a common identifica- tion, we’ve also had the abil- ity to include those students with non-disabled peers. That was something we’re interested in exploring down the road,” said Dietter.

With seven years of research, patented technol- ogy and successful demonstration programs in West Harford Public Schools, Movia works with channel partners to offer therapy and technolo- gy directly to children in the classroom. The company’s software system combines knowledge and expertise from education, psychology, physical therapy, speech pathology, robotics, speech recognition and artificial intelligence.

This past summer, Movia took first place in the StartUp Bristol business plan competition, winning a $5,000 grant for its relo- cation costs to the Walter Ingraham Mansion in Bristol.

Last spring, the pro- gram was well-received by students and staff when it was first introduced. Dietter recalled how the program taught the attention of a nonverbal student, who became so engaged with the robot that he took a next step in basic language for the first time.

“There were many peo- ple who were touched to see that,” said Dietter. “That was an example of an exchange that really forced us for that is something that’s potentially going to be very useful for our students.”

Through the program, Dietter said he hopes stu- dents will use the skills they learn inside the classroom, as home and in the commu- nity.

“Given that they’re so engaged and motivated to participate, we’re really hoping this will increase their skill acquisition and their ability to generalize,” said Dietter.

For more information about the Movia Robotics pilot program, contact the district’s Special Services Department at (860) 584-7051.