

Party chief contacts White Plains Dems over schools race

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WHITE PLAINS — City Democratic leader Liz Shollenberger has sent e-mails to 75 district leaders questioning the qualifications of a candidate in a nonpartisan school board race who ran as a Republican for the Common Council two years ago.

Attached to Shollenberger's e-mail was another e-mail from a former district leader that described the candidate, Augie Zicca, as a "Republican

stalwart" whose running mate, Elsie Lahrman, is "a regular contributor to Republican causes." The e-mail, from Steve Rabinowitz, asked "fellow Democrats" to send contributions to White Plains school board incumbents Peter Bassano and Donna McLaughlin.

Bassano and McLaughlin are unaffiliated voters, though Bassano recently switched his registration from Republican.

Jay Worana, general counsel to the New York State

School Boards Association, said political parties have a First Amendment right to participate in school board campaigns but that their involvement can be distracting.

"Generally, we hope that school board elections are focused on children and not necessarily what's best for adults," Worana said yesterday. "To the extent that people are voting along political lines and are not focusing on who has the best ideas and what's best for children, that's an unfortunate result."

Shollenberger yesterday denied she had injected the Democratic City Committee into a nonpartisan Board of Education race by using its e-mail list to spam district leaders with requests to vote for McLaughlin and Bassano and give to their campaigns.

"This is me using my home e-mail," Shollenberger said, noting that she used her personal AOL account to contact the district leaders. "It's just an e-mail. It's not spending any money. It's just providing information to people. We

don't have a horse in this race."

Three days after her first e-mail to district leaders reminding them of Zicca's earlier race for Common Council, Shollenberger sent them a second e-mail with McLaughlin's resume. Shollenberger received the resume from district leader Dennis Krolian, who got it from McLaughlin, along with a request.

"I just asked him, with people that he knew, if he could circulate my resume," McLaughlin said. "It's a friend

and he has a connection with a group of people in White Plains that go out and vote."

"I don't know that she specifically asked me to distribute (the resume) to Democrats," Krolian said.

The e-mails caused Zicca and Lahrman to skip a candidates forum sponsored by the League of Women Voters on Tuesday.

"They were getting their people there," Lahrman said yesterday. "I find it very offensive I have to defend being a Republican."

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