

## NORTHERN NEW YORK

Jefferson & Lewis B3  
Obituaries B4  
St. Lawrence B6

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## Watertown Daily Times

## BRIEFLY

## Hammond official denies conflict over wind farm

HAMMOND — Concerned Residents of Hammond is accusing town Councilman James E. Langtry of having a conflict of interest with a company that wants to build a wind farm in the community.

CROH President Mary E. Hamilton said in a letter to the Town Council that Mr. Langtry's sister, Susan Dunham, signed a lease with Iberdrola Renewables.

But Mr. Langtry said CROH's accusation shows the group is "nothing but a bunch of low-down dirty snakes. I haven't talked to my sister in three years. How can I say anything? I didn't know anything about any of the things she (Mrs. Hamilton) wrote about."

Ms. Dunham could not be reached for comment.

According to Mrs. Hamilton, the lease between Iberdrola Renewables and Ms. Dunham, 495 County Route 6, was signed Oct. 9, 2008, and received Dec. 18, 2008, by Iberdrola in Oregon.

## Work on Wellness Center gets under way at Claxton

OGDENSBURG — Construction has started on a new facility at Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center.

The Outpatient Wellness Center will expand the lung function testing, occupational and speech therapy, and sleep lab programs. The next phase of construction will construct a three-bed psychiatric evaluation center in the emergency room.

The construction replaces a former 17-bed nursing home. Work should conclude in the middle of next year, hospital spokeswoman Laura C. Shea said.

## Cranberry Lake, Fort Drum popular for bear hunting

Saturday was opening day for bear hunting season. Hunters who own a big game hunting license get one tag for a bear in addition to tags for deer.

Popular bear hunting locations include Cranberry Lake, part of the Adirondack Park in St. Lawrence county, and Fort Drum.

Hunters wishing to hunt at Fort Drum must acquire an additional hunting permit. For more information about that permit, call the Fort Drum Fish and Wildlife office at 772-4868.

## LOCAL PARAGRAPHS

■ MADRID — The Madrid-Waddington school board will have a meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the library.

■ The St. Lawrence County Highway Department will close the County Route 38 bridge in the town of Norfolk and the County Route 31 bridge in the town of Madrid on Monday. The bridges will be closed for about eight weeks while they are replaced.

■ POTSDAM — The Town Council will consider raising water and sewer rates for the first time in more than 30 years as part of this year's budget process. The proposal will be discussed after a joint Recreation Committee meeting with the village at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 29.

## SATURDAY LOTTERY

Daily Numbers: Midday 2, 6, 3 Lucky Sum: 11  
Evening 0, 6, 9 Lucky Sum: 15  
WinFour: Midday 4, 3, 6, 5 Lucky Sum: 18  
Evening 2, 2, 1, 0 Lucky Sum: 5  
Pick 10: 4, 7, 11, 13, 15, 18, 22, 24, 37, 45, 46, 49, 50, 53, 55, 66, 67, 74, 75, 76  
Take 5: 11, 12, 17, 18, 39  
Lotto: 21, 23, 26, 42, 51, 58 Bonus: 28  
Powerball: 1, 18, 37, 39, 44 Powerball: 13

## Milk pricing a priority in Assembly race

122ND DISTRICT: McGrath and Blankenbush look at state spending reforms to take burden off farms

By JUDE SEYMOUR  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

David V. Mullen hasn't forgotten the rate paid for milk after he took over sole proprietorship of his Gouverneur dairy farm in 1981. It was \$14.10 per hundred-weight, he recalled.

"Last month, I got \$16.50," the Kearney Road resident said. "So we've come up \$2.50 in 30 years."

Not even. Accounting for inflation, \$14.10 in 1981 is equal to \$32.85 today.

Mr. Mullen could beg intervention from Assemblywoman Dierdre K. Scozzafava — she lives less than five miles east of the farm — but his real problem is 800 miles to the west, where the easily manipulated price of cheese blocks at the Chicago Mercantile Ex-

## RACE TO THE FINISH LINE

Each Sunday, the Watertown Daily Times will analyze the issues and races that shape the 2010 elections.

## The issues

- Sept. 26: Energy policy
- Oct. 10: Economy, small business and agriculture

change serves as the standard for farm milk pricing.

- Oct. 24: Health reform and senior issues

## The race

- Today: 122nd Assembly District
- Oct. 3: 47th and 48th state Senate Districts
- Oct. 17: 23rd Congressional District

Both Republican Kenneth D. Blankenbush and Democrat

Brian S. McGrath, who are vying to replace Ms. Scozzafava, identified milk pricing as a top agriculture priority in the 122nd Assembly District in interviews last week.

And while they are powerless to change the pricing system, one of them will have sway over reducing farmers' costs for at

See MILKB2

## Health rules push probed

HEAT AT THE GRILL: County lawmakers questioning state's crackdown on groups

By ELIZABETH GRAHAM  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

CANTON — For years, Edwards Lions Club members thought they were following the state Health Department's food-safety rules when selling food to raise money at their annual festival.

Out of the blue this summer, however, the club's past president was contacted by a Health Department official who said the club needed a permit to operate its cook shack.

"We didn't know we had to do anything like that," Crystal K. Whitford said. "I couldn't tell you how many years we've done it. I don't know why there was a change this year."

Mrs. Whitford's organization is one of many that have fallen under state Health Department scrutiny in recent years, and St. Lawrence County lawmakers say they want answers about why community organizations seem suddenly to be under fire. They plan to meet with Health Department officials to find out.

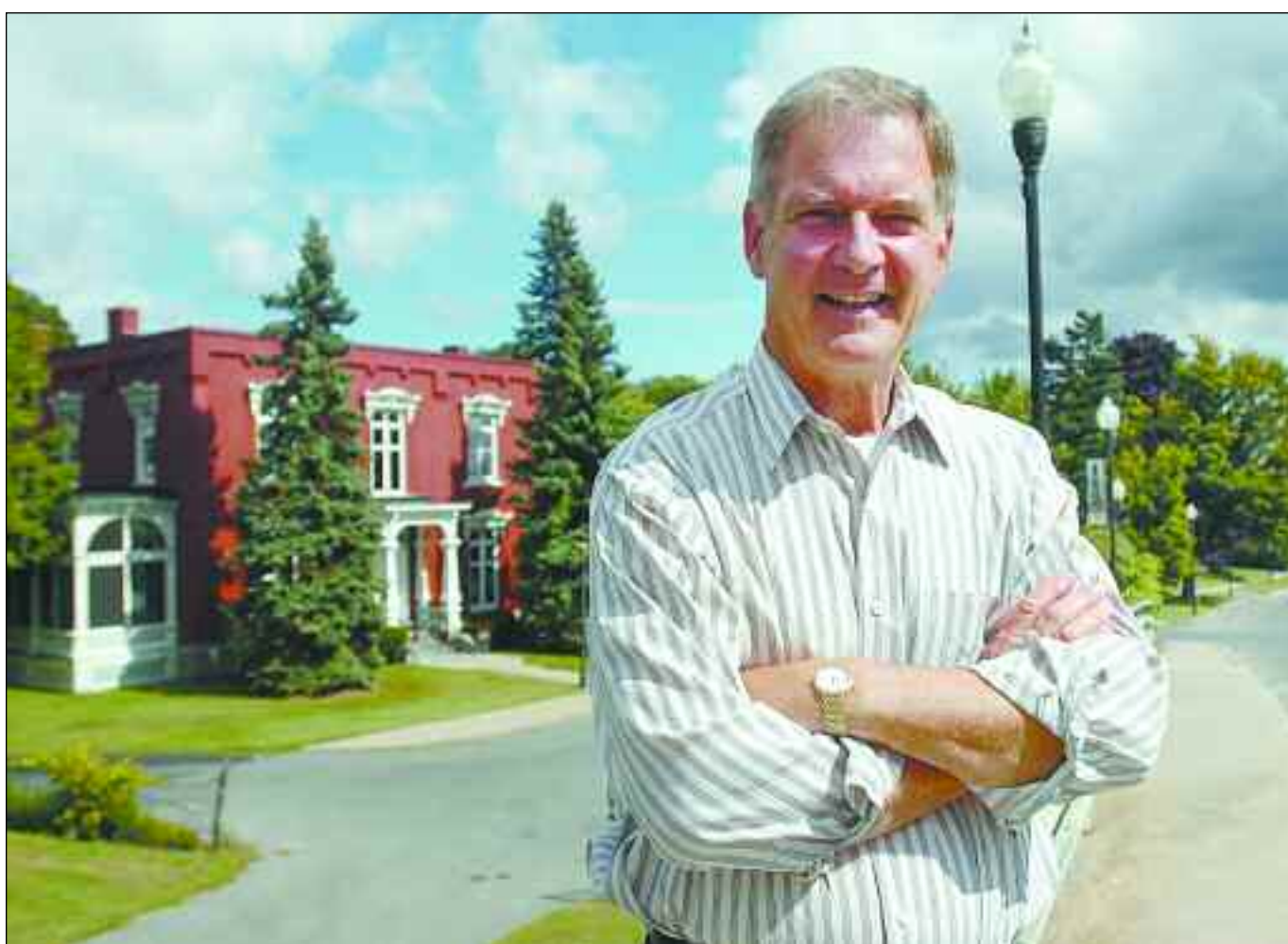
"The worst part is these are volunteers who do good deeds for their communities, and they're just trying to supplement the money they give to their communities," said Legislator Sallie A. Brothers, D-Norfolk. "I have no problem respecting the need for cleanliness in food, but I have yet to hear of any problems from these events, and I go to a lot of them."

Legislator Donald A. Peck, R-Gouverneur, president of the Gouverneur & St. Lawrence County Fair, said he's heard from fair food vendors that the Health Department's rules are enforced more strictly in St. Lawrence County than anywhere else.

"We hear it every year," Mr. Peck said. "They ask them to do things here that they just don't ask them to do in other counties."

Health Department spokesman Thomas A. Allocco said Friday in an e-mail message that the rules are applied evenly.

See HEALTH B2



MELANIE KIMBLER-LAGO ■ WATERTOWN DAILY TIMES

William L. Owens, in front of his former law office in Plattsburgh, turned down jobs in New York City to stay in the north country.

## RISING TO FILL A VOID

23RD DISTRICT RACE: Once apolitical, Owens stood up after death of colleague

By MARC HELLER  
TIMES WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT

WASHINGTON — One of William L. Owens's favorite souvenirs hangs on a door in his Capitol Hill office.

It's a target practice sheet he saved after shooting a round with a Beretta M-9 semiautomatic handgun at the U.S. Capitol Police firing range, complete with concentric circles on a figure of a bad guy.

With seven holes blown inside the circles, Mr. Owens appears to be a decent shot.

Mr. Owens's shooting prowess may not be the progressive image his party's leader in Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., wants to polish for Democrats. But it might just help him hit the big target he's shooting for this fall: the legitimacy that re-election would bring a year after he won the seat in a flukish three-way special election after Rep. John M. McHugh resigned to become secretary of the Army.

A newcomer to politics, Mr. Owens, D-Plattsburgh, is sticking to the image, at least, of a different kind of Democrat and a different kind of politician — if the word "politician" even describes him.

He is willing to support his party's initiatives on economic recovery, which focus largely on government



## THE RACE FOR THE 23rd District

Candidate Douglas L. Hoffman was featured in the Times on July 25. Matthew A. Doheny was featured Aug. 15. Their stories can be found at <http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/election>

spending, but wrote legislation to curb the deficit. He says undocumented immigrants working on farms should be able to stay in the United States, but should not be offered a path to citizenship as many Democrats want. He shows off his marksmanship but has a low-key, even distant style — a white

shirt and yellow tie "is about as exciting as I get," he said in a recent interview in his Washington office.

Just as his predecessor, Mr. McHugh, R-Pierrepont Manor, defied political categories, Mr. Owens, 61, is hard to pin down as a liberal or conservative or simply a pragmatist. But unlike Mr. McHugh, who built a career in middle-of-the-road north country politics, Mr. Owens does not have a political upbringing to credit for his moderation or bipartisanship or dispassion or whichever Washington adjective ultimately fits.

Indeed, Mr. Owens's crash course in elective politics has taken perhaps a bigger cost on his personal life than ever faced by Mr. McHugh, a divorcee with no children. For now, Mr. Owens has had to let go of the very reason he chose to live in the north country: a slower pace of living that gave him more time with his family.

"That's the most difficult aspect of it," he said.

On Nov. 2, he will be on the ballot facing Republican Matthew A. Doheny and Conservative Douglas L. Hoffman.

## EARLY LIFE ON LONG ISLAND

Mr. Owens was born Jan. 24, 1949, in Brooklyn, but spent most of his

See OWENS B5

## State police shoot man after Franklin standoff

CAMP INCIDENT: Suspect fired at troopers first

By CONNIE JENKINS  
JOHNSON NEWSPAPERS

BRANDON — State police shot a man they say caused an hours-long armed standoff Thursday in Franklin County.

Michael J. Nelson, 37, no fixed address, is expected to be charged with attempted mur-

der and first-degree burglary once he recovers from a gunshot wound, Franklin County District Attorney Derek P. Champagne said at a news conference Friday.

Mr. Nelson is recovering at an

See MAN B2

## Poverty studied as school issue

STATE TEST SCORES: County looking for trend to explain 2009 slump

By SUSAN MENDE  
JOHNSON NEWSPAPERS

CANTON — Results of last year's state tests have prompted St. Lawrence County school officials to examine the impact of poverty on student achievement and how to close the gap.

The state's new tougher scoring system greatly reduced the

percentage of students in grades three through eight who passed mandated assessments that measure proficiency in math and English language arts.

In response, officials from the St. Lawrence-Lewis Board of Educational Services have started to analyze test results from the

region's 18 public school districts.

They hope to identify trends as well as devise strategies for meeting new beefed-up standards that hold school districts more accountable for student performance.

"Right now, we're looking at

See POVERTY B2

THE RACE FOR THE  
**23rd District**

# Owens kept a low profile about his party affiliation

FROM PAGE B1

childhood on Long Island. He grew up in Hempstead and Mineola, the only child of a mother who was a homemaker and a father who had been a gunner aboard a B-24 bomber in Germany during World War II.

He started at Our Lady of Loretto School, a Catholic elementary school in Hempstead, then his family moved to Mineola when he was 14. He still carries a Brooklyn accent.

He was active for a few years in Boy Scouts, long enough to earn 11 merit badges and gain the rank of Life Scout — one rank below Eagle. His father was an assistant scoutmaster.

No one in his family was active in politics, the congressman said, although his grandfather was active in organized labor.

He played baseball and football as a youngster, both inside and outside of school, and “never missed a homework assignment,” said Michael Hickey, who described himself as an “inseparable” friend and classmate of Mr. Owens from kindergarten through eighth grade. Their families attended the same Catholic church.

As youngsters, Mr. Owens and Mr. Hickey played sandlot baseball, sometimes hitting balls onto the roof of a nearby dry cleaners. As they grew older, they played more basketball and football.

“In every sport but basketball he was much better. He just ran over people in football,” Mr. Hickey said.

Mr. Owens liked to debate, Mr. Hickey said, and could easily take either side of an issue.

In high school, he forged easy relationships with people who were different from him, say friends who knew him. One of Mr. Owens’s classmates at Chaminade High School in Long Island, a Catholic boys school, was Bill O’Reilly, the Fox Broadcasting Co. program host, who in a telephone interview recalled that his friend did not seem to fit in any particular clique.

He said Mr. Owens often helped him with class work and had him over to his home a few times, even though they came from different backgrounds.

“I came from a lower economic realm than he did,” said Mr. O’Reilly, who sat directly in front of Mr. Owens in a homeroom of about 45 students. “We were good buds in the classroom. I just remember he was smarter than me.”

**COLLEGE, THEN AIR FORCE**

Mr. Hickey said he stayed close to Mr. Owens, even after the Owens family moved a few towns away, to Mineola. They eventually went off to separate colleges and separate careers, even separate countries — Mr. Hickey now lives in Montreal — but never lost touch.

With the Vietnam War raging, Mr. Owens asked his father, the World War II airman, about military service.

“He urged me that if I was going into the military, to go into the Air Force,” Mr. Owens said.

He decided to attend Manhattan College in part because it had a Reserve Officers Training Corps program. In 1971, Mr. Owens graduated summa cum laude with a degree in business administration.

He went on to Fordham Law School in the Bronx — marrying his college girlfriend, Jane Norton, along the way — and graduated in the top half of his class in 1974. During law school, he and Jane, a 20-year-old college sophomore, lived in a dorm that Mr. Owens managed, the only married couple there.

Juggling marriage, work and law school might be the biggest challenge Mr. Owens has faced, Mr. Hickey said. “He didn’t have much time off.”

After Fordham, Mr. Owens joined the Air Force. “I think there’s an obligation on the part of citizens to serve,” he said.

In his four-year tour required from his ROTC program, he was first sent Michigan before being transferred in 1977 to Plattsburgh Air Force Base, where he reached the rank of captain, and was introduced to the north country.

Mr. Owens already had a 2-year-old daughter, Tara, by the time he was stationed at Plattsburgh. The couple would go on to have another daughter, Jenna, and a son, Brendan.



**William L. Owens, left, then an ROTC student at Manhattan College, receives an award in 1971. Mr. Owens graduated from Fordham Law School, then joined the U.S. Air Force and was sent to Wurtsmith AFB in Oscoda, Mich., where he was a defense legal counsel, right. (Photos provided by William Owens)**



After leaving the Air Force, Mr. Owens worked briefly in New York City and had lucrative law-related job offers there, Mr. Hickey said, but he decided to return to Plattsburgh and practice law.

“He said, ‘If I live in Plattsburgh, I can go at 3 to watch my kids play ball or whatever,’” Mr. Hickey said.

“We thought it was a better living environment,” Mr. Owens said. “We liked the pace. It is a slower pace.”

**PUTTING DOWN ROOTS**

Mr. Owens quickly built a career close to Plattsburgh business leaders. He joined a law firm headed by James A. FitzPatrick, the former state assemblyman from Plattsburgh and New York Power Authority chairman. That firm merged in 1989 with a partnership headed by state Sen. Ronald B. Stafford, who died in 2005.

In his association with those firms, Mr. Owens gained prominent clients in and around Plattsburgh, including NBT Bank and Champlain Valley Physicians Hospital Medical Center.

Mr. Owens was general counsel for CVPH, reviewing all legal and business decisions but not heavily involved in defending lawsuits, for instance, said Stephens Mundy, the hospital’s president and chief executive officer.

“It takes someone who has a wide, wide variety of skills, who understands the human aspects of it,” Mr. Mundy said. “He’s one of the smartest people I know.”

One of his biggest impacts on the hospital had nothing to do with the law. When CVPH was raising money a few years ago for a \$37 million construction project, the chairman of the fundraising campaign resigned a third of the way through the effort, and Mr. Owens quickly stepped in, Mr. Mundy said. His own firm made a hefty contribution, and Mr. Owens sought others to support the project — a fundraising skill that would serve him well in politics. The goal was \$3 million, but Mr. Owens helped bring in \$8.1 million, Mr. Mundy said.

While friends from his youth saw Mr. Owens’s athletic side, Mr. Mundy grew to know Mr. Owens the naturalist. Living about a mile apart near Valcour Island in Lake Champlain, they share a love of kayaking, as well as a streak of early bird.

“At 5 a.m., we’ll agree to meet and watch the sunrise,” Mr. Mundy said, a ritual they have continued occasionally since Mr. Owens’s election.

Mr. Owens might have made more money had he chosen to work in New York City rather than Plattsburgh, but he did not struggle financially before coming to Washington. He made more than \$700,000 the year before he came to Congress, and more than \$400,000 in his law practice last year. All three of his children had at least some private schooling before going to college.

**WASHINGTON CALLING**

When Mr. McHugh decided to quit his congressional seat, Mr. Owens had little name recognition outside of Plattsburgh. His political leanings? They were a mystery, even to family and friends.

Mr. Owens said he voted for the re-election of Jimmy Carter for president in 1980 but turned his support to Ronald Reagan in 1984. Still, politics was not a dominant topic of conversation in the Owens household, said his son, 25-year-old

Brendan, although he said the family did watch the news after dinner.

His longtime friend Mr. Hickey said in a telephone interview, “He’s never talked about his political leanings. ... In terms of a political ideology, it was nonexistent.”

Roderic G. Giltz, chairman of Northern Insuring, Plattsburgh, which employed Mr. Owens as its lawyer for two decades, said, “People thought he was a Republican. We all did. I did.”

As recently as 2004, the Republican Gov. George E. Pataki appointed him to the College Council at SUNY Plattsburgh, where he had been a business law instructor from 1978 to 1985.

But Mr. Owens never registered as a Republican, instead registering as an independent. When he announced he was running for Congress, he said he would list his party affiliation as Democrat.

“I’ve always been interested in politics as an avocation,” Mr. Owens said. “Stafford and I talked politics. Frequently, I agreed with him on process but not on substance.”

Mr. Owens could have run credibly as either a Democrat or Republican, Mr. Giltz said. He was encouraged to run by none other than Mr. McHugh, whom Mr. Owens called before announcing he would run as a Democrat, said the congressman’s spokesman, Sean Magers.

Even Fox’s Mr. O’Reilly, who generally supports Republicans, admits his old classmate has some cross-party appeal.

“I would have voted for Owens if I was up there. He’s an honest guy,” Mr. O’Reilly said. Democrats, of course, had a candidate with wide name recognition among political insiders — John T. Sullivan Jr. of Oswego — but his political background also included potential political baggage as mayor of Oswego. Democratic chairmen took a chance on Mr. Owens, figuring his background away from politics could make him another Scott Murphy, the former businessman from Glens Falls who had won a contentious special election earlier in the year to fill the vacancy of Rep. Kirsten E. Gillibrand, D-N.Y., whom Gov. David A. Paterson appointed to the Senate.

Mr. Owens’s decision to run was an extension of his and other Plattsburgh-area business leaders’ concern that the death of Mr. Stafford had cost the region political influence, Mr. Giltz said. Months earlier, Mr. Owens had organized about a half dozen area leaders to discuss how to retain some of the political weight Mr. Stafford had given the region. Then came the news that Mr. McHugh would vacate the congressional seat in which he had built seniority.

As a Democrat, Mr. Owens benefited from the Republicans’ disarray that saw Republican Assemblywoman Dierdre K. Scozzafava’s campaign fall apart and Conservative challenger Hoffman gaining high-profile endorsement from Sarah Palin and other national political figures.

Enough Republicans either switched to Mr. Owens or didn’t vote. Mr. Owens squeaked by, besting Mr. Hoffman by fewer than 4,000 votes, to become the district’s first Democratic representative in more than 100 years.

**LESS THAN A YEAR IN OFFICE**

But with all other House seats open as well this time, the 23rd Congressional District no longer is gaining headlines, and Mr. Owens carries on without much glamor in Washington — or, for that matter, in the district.

He said he barely notices any difference in how he is treated around Plattsburgh, where people already knew him, and he’s still a stranger to many in Oswego or Gloversville, although people are beginning to recognize him. Few people confront him about how he voted on one bill or another, he said.

“In Plattsburgh, there’s virtually no change. Everybody comes up to me as they did before,” Mr. Owens said. “I like the fact that I’m treated like I’ve always been.”

On the other hand, he said, grocery store visits are no longer a quick in-and-out affairs. He and his wife, Jane, discovered that early on, when people stopped him in the aisles and turned a short grocery run into a long one.

Mr. Owens acknowledged that becoming a member of Congress has transformed his personal life, stealing away any hope of spending more time with his wife now that their children are grown.

“The opposite has happened,” he said. In his law practice, Mr. Owens said, “80 per-

cent of the time I was home at 6 p.m.” Now he is gone four nights a week, and when he comes home for the weekend he has commitments around a congressional district so big it includes media markets from Plattsburgh to Albany to Syracuse.

The unpredictable schedule continues to confound him. On the last day of the summer session, Mr. Owens couldn’t say at 6 p.m. how late he would be working that night, or whether he would be in Washington or at home the next day — which is the nature of pre-recess cram sessions. His staff had reserved at least three flights home.

“It’s clearly very different” from the life he knew before, Mr. Owens said. “I came from an ordered situation that I largely controlled. It is the lack of order that is somewhat perplexing.”

Mr. Owens may be carrying his non-cliquish behavior to Congress. He has yet to display an obvious social network in Washington; after several months in office, he said he had yet to speak with his next-door neighbor in the Rayburn House Office Building, Rep. James L. Oberstar, D-Minn., although Mr. Oberstar is Congress’s resident expert on the St. Lawrence Seaway and has visited Massena.

“Bill can be aloof at times,” said Mr. Giltz, and has had to learn to watch his mouth. The congressman readily admits to occasionally debating his own constituents on the phone — as in asking a caller which section of the health care reform allegedly contains an objectionable provision, when he knows full well it doesn’t exist.

But Mr. Owens is bright and thoughtful with a keen business sense, Mr. Giltz said, and he is working on his demeanor. Politicians develop that skill over time.

“I saw him this morning, and I said, ‘You’re sounding more congressional,’” Mr. Giltz said.

Mr. Owens’s closest comrade in Congress may be Mr. Murphy, D-Glens Falls, a generation his junior, whose district abuts Mr. Owens’s in the Adirondacks. They have sponsored legislation together, and they sit next to each other on the House Armed Services Committee. They also both serve on the House Agriculture Committee.

They are not personally close — Mr. Murphy said they do not talk much outside of congressional settings — but they have something in common: both came from private sector backgrounds without political experience. They both also came to office in highly contested special elections in Republican-leaning districts, although Mr. Murphy could not recall discussing that shared experience at length, saying, “I’m sure we’ve talked about it some.”

They tend to stick to business in their conversations, talking about military matters on the Armed Services Committee or legislation on, Mr. Murphy said, “getting the economy working.”

Mr. Owens has said that Mr. Murphy is one of the first people he goes to before he introduces legislation. Mr. Murphy has signed on to five of the 16 bills and resolutions introduced by Mr. Owens, often as one of just a handful of cosponsors. He is one of just

two lawmakers, for instance, to join Mr. Owens on a bill to extend tax deductions for depreciable business and investment assets. He is the only colleague to cosponsor Mr. Owens’s measure to establish a process for the public to view House and committee proceedings online.

Mr. Owens has a sense of two big issues, warfare and health care, in ways that he does not talk about much because they are so personal. His biggest challenge, he said, was discontinuing care for his ailing, 87-year-old mother in June 2009. Although they had discussed her wishes several times, he said, “It’s always been very emotional for me.”

His 87-year-old father, like many World War II veterans, never spoke much of his experiences as Mr. Owens was growing up.

But once, when Mr. Owens’s son, Brendan, was a young boy, he was watching a World War II movie with his father and grandfather. A German plane was shown being shot down, obviously killing those on board, and Brendan “reacted like a kid” seeing what he considered to be a cool scene.

The World War II B-24 gunner had a different take.

“My dad said, ‘That’s somebody’s little boy,’” Mr. Owens recalled. “That really captured the personal impact of a war.”

**MAJORITY TO MINORITY?**

Mr. Owens came to Congress at the tail end of a surge for Democrats, three years after they took control of the House and a year after they won the White House and gained a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. Now his party’s fortunes have plummeted, and Mr. Owens suddenly faces the prospect of serving in the minority should he ride out the electoral wave that is closing in on Democrats.

Outside of losing an election, serving in the minority may be the darkest prospect for a Washington politician — especially for someone who has experienced life in the majority. Influence vanishes. Campaign contributions shrink. Many lawmakers choose to retire.

“As you can imagine, it’s not a subject people are thrilled to talk about,” Mr. Owens said.

As a freshman, he does not have much influence to lose. Still, he looks for positive ways to spin the situation: the district, not party politics, is his main concern, he said. The district is not all that partisan anyway, and neither is he.

“I look at it as service,” Mr. Owens said. “Whether in the majority or the minority, it’s service nonetheless.”



**Rep. William L. Owens recently played in a congressional baseball game in Washington, D.C., wearing a uniform shirt from the SUNY Plattsburgh Cardinals. His grandchildren attended the game and joined him on the field before the contest.**