

No movie magic here



THE COLUMN

Joye Brown

joye.brown@newsday.com

Risky Business” and “Trading Places” were two movies released in the summer of 1983. But Nassau and Suffolk counties seem to be channeling the films — or at least their titles — as analyses of their proposed 2018 budgets.

“Risky Business?”

That goes for both counties.

For Suffolk, an assessment by the county’s independent office of budget review found that the \$3.05 billion budget proposed by County Executive Steve Bellone overestimates sales tax revenue, underestimates police department pay and relies on — yes — “risky” assumptions that could widen the struc-

tural deficit.

In Nassau, the county’s financial control board also branded some revenue assumptions in County Executive Edward Mangano’s proposed plan as risky, including \$60 million in county fee increases that lawmakers are unlikely to approve before Election Day.

As for “Trading Places?”

Looks like Suffolk is projected to have a 2018 structural deficit larger than that estimated for Nassau, where the Nassau Interim Finance Authority has overseen county budgets for 17 years — six of them as a control board with the authority to reject budgets.

Suffolk and Nassau seem to be trading places in other areas, too.

The 31-page NIFA report on Mangano’s budget included some praise.

For instance, the authority noted that Nassau had “re-

aligned its finances” and whittled away its structural deficit, which reached a high of \$182 million in 2014.

The Office of Budget Review’s 200-page report for Suffolk, meanwhile, started its introductory section with a quote:

“Ask yourself if what you’re doing today is getting you closer to where you want to be tomorrow.”

One issue for both counties is sales tax proceeds, which account for the largest source of revenue — yes, larger than the county portion of the property tax.

In Suffolk, sales tax revenue estimates for 2018 are too high, analysts said.

In Nassau, estimates are conservative, according to NIFA, although not conservative enough.

Risky savings assumptions in Suffolk include tens of millions of dollars in concessions from public employee unions,

because contracts haven’t yet been negotiated.

The BRO report also questioned the county’s plan to pull in revenue through borrowing, including dipping into the sewer Assessment Stabilization fund.

NIFA complained about similar tactics. It noted that Nassau’s intention to borrow from a reserve fund in 2018 would do little to bring down its deficit. NIFA also said it didn’t buy the county’s assertion that increases in pay for union employees would be cost-neutral because of savings elsewhere.

We could go on. But the bottom line — from two independent assessments — is that Nassau, with a control board, still is having the kinds of troubles that Suffolk now is facing.

Which, politically and governmentally, makes fixing finances on Long Island risky business indeed.

Convicted in fatal Suffolk crash

BY ANDREW SMITH
andrew.smith@newsday.com

A Suffolk judge convicted a Sound Beach man of second-degree manslaughter for killing a man while driving drunk the wrong way on Sunrise Highway, but the judge acquitted the defendant of a murder charge prosecutors also sought.

State Supreme Court Justice Fernando Camacho, who heard the case against Christopher O’Brien, 56, without a jury in Central Islip, said although there was enough evidence to try the case as a murder, there was not enough to convict on the higher count.

“I do have a reasonable doubt” on that charge, he said without elaborating. Murder charges in vehicular deaths are rarely brought and convictions are rarer still.

“The verdict is exactly what we were saying from the very beginning,” defense attorney Scott Gross of Hauppauge said. “The verdict is just and fair.”

Both sides had agreed that



Car driven by Christopher O'Brien, left, killed Thomas D'Eletto

O'Brien was intoxicated early on the foggy morning of Dec. 23, 2015, and that he drove east in the westbound lanes of Sunrise Highway, ultimately crashing into and killing Thomas D'Eletto, 57, an Aquebogue project engineer heading to work in Nassau County.

Gross said his client has been remorseful for his actions all along and would have pleaded guilty to the manslaughter charge if that had been an option. However, Suffolk prosecutors charged O'Brien with second-degree murder, arguing at a two-week

trial in Central Islip that he had acted with depraved indifference to human life.

Murder carries a maximum penalty of 25 years to life in prison while second-degree manslaughter carries a maximum of 5 to 15 years.

Assistant District Attorney Marc Lindemann said he was “disappointed” with the verdict, but said his office would continue to charge defendants aggressively when appropriate.

He noted that O'Brien stopped at a red light and could have reconsidered what

he was doing before ending up going the wrong way on Sunrise Highway, but instead continued to run people off the road.

“It could have been any of those other people who was the ultimate victim,” Lindemann said. Unfortunately, he said it was D'Eletto who was killed.

“This was an individual doing the right thing, two days before Christmas, just going to work,” Lindemann said.

D'Eletto’s wife was present for the verdict but declined to comment.

In his closing argument, Gross told the judge there was no evidence that O'Brien had the state of mind necessary for a murder conviction.

“We are not asking for a pass,” Gross said. “We are not arguing actual innocence. We are asking you to hold him accountable for what he did, but not for what he didn’t do.”

Gross also said O'Brien avoided cars before the crash in Yaphank. But Lindemann said O'Brien didn’t get out of the way — he just missed.

Motorcade leads machinery to knock down trees at Melville groundbreaking of Christopher Levi's home

