



SCOTCH PLAINS

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FORTY CENTS

INCREASED COMMUNICATION WITH VOLUNTEERS SEEN AS KEY TO SETTLEMENT

Firefighters Working Out Complaints With Help of Consultant, Subcommittees

Fireman Attributes Poor Morale to Failure to Answer Questions; Council Body Reports Expected Soon; Consultant Says Township's Officials Had to Learn How to Focus on Meeting Needs of Their Personnel

By JOY LePREE
Specially Written for The Times

The sparks that have been flying in the Scotch Plains Fire Department since 1991 finally seem to be dying down due to the work of subcommittees and the consultant which were appointed by the Township Council. The problems with the department's equipment, morale and their Chief Jonathan Ellis surfaced in mid-1991, when members of Company No. 2 took a list of complaints to Township Manager Thomas E. Atkins.

"superficial remedies" were made at the time, but then the complaints were not looked into further.

During this time, Company No. 1 was experiencing similar problems, according to Mr. Feury.

Among the complaints were faulty and outdated equipment and uniforms, and a lack of communication between the volunteer firefighters and Chief Ellis, whose salary is paid by the township.

Mr. Feury said about the water tanks used by the department, which reportedly leak, "The equipment is a danger. You can't guess what is in a tank. It's a danger a volunteer shouldn't have to take."

He said the money that was supposed to go to new tanks was used to purchase an aerial truck, which was intended for use on the South side of the township; Company No. 2's territory, but was stored on the North side, where it does not fit in the garage.

Mr. Feury added the company asked why, but was not given a response. He attributes unanswered questions like this to the lack of morale.

"There are a lot of unanswered questions which make morale poor. We are left in the dark and we just have to do what he, Chief Ellis, says, but he's not the one whose job it is to go into burning buildings," Mr. Feury said.

This past November the Township Council hired Dr. Denis Onieal, who has been on the Jersey City Fire Department for 22 years and its Deputy Fire Chief for three years, as a consultant to look into the situation, evaluate the problems and suggest solutions.

Also, three council subcommittees have been set up to discuss the complaints and draft reports about the action needed to remedy the problems.

The subcommittees each have one council member and five firefighters and are broken down into the following categories: Capital equipment, personal equipment and gear and morale and facilities.

Mr. Feury is on the morale and facilities subcommittee. According to Mr. Atkins, the goal of the subcommittees is to "develop an action plan for things that should be addressed in the near future and in the long run."

Mr. Atkins said the morale and facilities and the personal equipment and gear subcommittees have been very active, and the capital equipment subcommittee is waiting for its report before issuing its own, because some recommendations from the committees may be similar.

"The subcommittees have been working hard together with the council and with the chief. I think it's working well," Mr. Atkins said.

He said the reports should be is-

sued within 10 days, and Dr. Onieal then will meet with all involved parties to begin the next steps.

Firefighter and personal equipment and gear committee member John Lestarchick also believes the committees are working.

"At this time I am very satisfied with our committee. So far it looks like our problems will be ironed out."

But Mr. Lestarchick was not sure about the success of the morale committee. "All our problems on the equipment committee could be solved with money, but it is different with the morale committee."

Dr. Onieal said when he began working as a consultant to Scotch

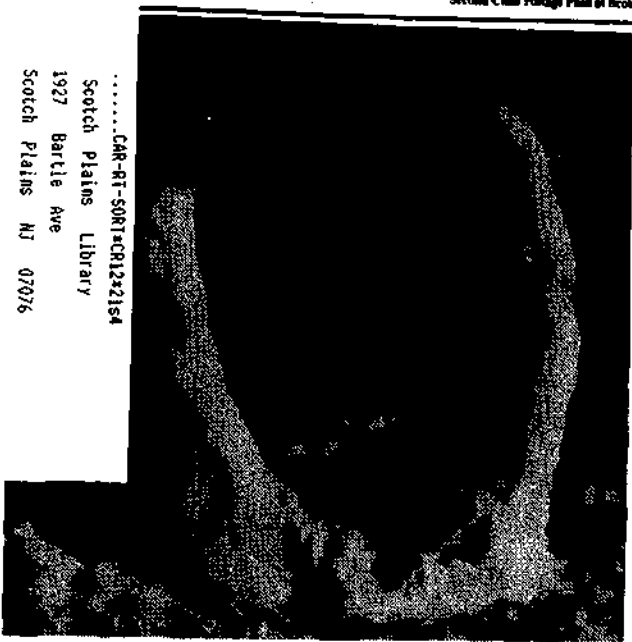
Plains he found "a group of very dedicated firefighters who had been kind of ignored. They really had come to the end of their rope."

The problem, according to Dr. Onieal, was not the Chief was not doing his job, but the Township Council did not have an understanding of how to handle the situation.

"It was a breakdown of communication. They didn't understand firefighters do not complain, but when they do, they mean it," Dr. Onieal said.

The consultant added the subcommittees have worked because they have introduced the governing body

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Joanna Marsh for The Times
SIGN OF LOVE...This Valentine was made in the snow on Watson Road, Fanwood, by Howard Drewes and his children, James Drewes, 10, and Amy Drewes, 7, for their wife and mother, Mrs. Sally Drewes.

Superintendent Recommends Adding Days at the End of the School Year

District Must Make Up Sessions Lost Due to Storms and Much Icy Weather

By GLENN R. KAPLINSKY
Specially Written for The Times

Dr. Carol B. Choye, the Superintendent of Schools, recommended to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education at its conference meeting that Wednesday and Thursday, June 22 and 23, be added to the school calendar.

If necessary Friday, June 24, also would be added.

These would be make-up days for those lost during the recent snow storms.

The state mandates a minimum 180-day school year.

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood school calendar for this year is 184 days.

Six snow days already have been used.

According to Dr. Choye, the Governor, Mrs. Christine Todd Whitman, will not "forgive" any days.

Board Secretary Richard J. Marshall gave board members the proposed 1994 school budget.

Dr. Choye states the budget top priority is "what is best for youngsters."

This budget, she added, is "more explicit about priorities."

The board will not find out how much the district will receive in state aid until about Tuesday, March 15.

Mr. Marshall, in compiling the budget is assuming the school system will receive the same amount of aid it did from the state last year.

The Superintendent noted, "The teachers carry the real responsibility of helping youngsters learn. Approximately \$83,000 has been budgeted for strategic planning."

The proposed 1994 budget contains no increases except for salary. The increase of 2.8 per cent over last year's budget translates into a little over \$1.3 million, officials said.

A rise in local property taxes of 3.9 per cent is forecast due to school expenses.

Federal aid to the township and borough schools has been cut dramatically, Mr. Marshall said.

He noted approximately 12 percent of the funds in the 1993-1994 spending plan came from the state.

The full board will review the performance over the last 10 months of the Superintendent at its Thursday, March 24 meeting.

Individual board members, prior to that session, will write their own evaluations of Dr. Choye.

The March 24 meeting will see a review of her contract and compensation.

On Tuesday, March 1, Dr. Choye will give a report on the state of the schools and her goals for the future.

A discussion of the school district's family leave policy also was undertaken at last Thursday's session.

The board's attorney, Casper D. Boehm, Jr., advised the members to rethink the policy, since the current family leave regulations are not in compliance with federal law, he said.

Federal law requires up to 12 weeks per year of family leave be offered.

Mr. Boehm urged the board not to "Create additional benefits in your policy."

Due to inconsistencies in the fam-

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Due to Snowstorms, Council Votes For Tax Payments Without Penalty

Any Bill Postmarked on or Before February 10 Will Be Accepted Without Extra Charge

By GLENN R. KAPLINSKY
Specially Written for The Times

A conference meeting of the Scotch Plains Township council was held Tuesday to set the agenda for the next public meeting on February 22.

Students from the high school Distributive Education Club will conduct Tuesday's meeting.

They also will make public their survey of the downtown business district. The last public meeting on February 10 was canceled due to a snow storm.

A resolution was passed regarding the late payment of quarterly taxes which were due on February 10.

The resolution provides, "Any tax payment received through the mail which has a postmark on or before February 10 shall be exempt from interest penalties which would normally be assessed."

Township Manager Thomas E.

Atkins, in a letter to the council dated February 14, stated he will have a draft 1994 municipal budget to the council within a week.

The task of Mr. Atkins is made difficult due to the fact at the

present time there are no available state aid figures one could rely on to prepare a budget.

He again stated his view, "The Manager needs authority to change the budget based on what

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Joanna Marsh for The Times
OLD MAN WINTER...A snow sculpture of a man sitting on a snow bank was made by some creative residents of Martine Avenue, Scotch Plains. The storms which plagued the area provided much grief for motorists, but many outlets for artistic expression.

Borough Boy Scouts Explore Government

Salary for Treasurer Draws Councilman's Protest

By TUCKER TRIMBLE
Specially Written for The Times

"An ordinance is a local law, and a resolution is an authority of the borough, used for moving money around," explained Fanwood Mayor, Mrs. Linda Stender to the 10 members of Boy Scout Troop No. 33 who attended the Borough Council meeting Wednesday.

The council then approved an ordinance amending the 1993 salary ordinance on second reading and to adopt a resolution establishing the salary for the Borough Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer.

Concerning the ordinance, Councilman Andrew J. MacDonald told his colleagues, "The numbers are entirely too high, and urged the council not to endorse it."

Both he and Councilman Donald S. Koltjerahn voted no, but the ordinance carried with Councilmen Louis C. Jung, Bruce Walsh and Council President, Mrs. Maryanne Connolly, supporting it.

Councilman Kevin McGonigle was

absent from the meeting.

The vote was the same for the resolution establishing the salary for Mrs. Barbara Brennan as Borough Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer.

"This is a very important role for the borough," the Mayor said.

After reading the resolution, Councilman MacDonald asked Borough Attorney Dennis Bittis what would happen if he did not move the resolution, and after being told someone else would do so, he made the motion.

It has been the practice in Fanwood to move the resolution and then vote against it if this is what is desired, Mr. Bittis said.

"This is a 16.5 per cent increase," the Councilman told the council. "In my opinion it just doesn't warrant that increase."

The salary for Mrs. Brennan is set at \$29,500 retroactively to January 1, he noted.

"I think she is capable and has done a good job," he continued, speaking

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State's Suburban Areas Show Gain in Population

Census Figures of 1992 Show Urban Populace Drop

The Garden State's suburban and rural sections have gained in population at the expense of inner cities, according to United States Census Bureau estimates from 1992.

In a report issued on February 7, the Census Bureau said nationwide shifts in the amount of people between 1990 and 1992 showed declines in some of New Jersey's most densely populated areas.

The largest city in the state, Newark, was reported among 45 large cities in the nation which lost residents over the two years.

Figures from two years ago showed an overall downturn in the state's urban centers, including Newark, down 2.7 per cent; Atlantic City, 1.9 per cent; East Orange, 1.8 per cent; Elizabeth, 1.9 per cent; Passaic, 1.9 per cent; Paterson, 1.1 per cent, and Plainfield, 2.6 per cent.

Topping the list of the United States cities of more than 100,000 which lost population between 1990 and 1992 was Hartford, Connecticut.

Also included among the top 45 in that category were Newark, Elizabeth and Paterson.

Newark, whose population was 275,221 in 1990, dropped to 267,849 by 1992.

Newark officials, however, continue to claim the Census Bureau missed a number of people in that city, as it did in 1990.

According to a spokesman for the state Department of Labor, however, Newark has shown a continuing decline while other Essex County communities have been growing in population.

The more densely populated areas

of the state are slowing down in growth, according to the spokesman, and, in a continuation of a 20-year trend, the more open areas are growing.

The United States figures show Somerset, Hunterdon and Gloucester Counties with the highest percentage of growth in the state.

Reports also indicate immigrant influx into the Garden State has boosted population numbers in suburban areas.

For example, Edison, Piscataway and West Windsor are some of the favorite areas of residence for those

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BOARD OF EDUCATION SETS BUDGET MEETING

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education has announced several meetings to discuss the proposed 1994-1995 school budget.

All sessions will be held at 8 p.m. in the board Administration Offices at Cedar Street and Evergreen Avenue, Scotch Plains.

The meetings are scheduled for today and Tuesday, February 22; Tuesday, March 1, and Thursday, March 3.

It also is possible the board may discuss the budget at its public meeting at 8 p.m. on Thursday, February 24.

DEADLINES HELP PAPERS SERVE YOU

Those preparing press releases for submission to The Westfield Leader or The Times are reminded all copy should be in the hands of the Editor at 50 Elm Street, Westfield, by 4 p.m. on the Friday before the Thursday on which they wish it to appear.

Leader releases also may be mailed to Post Office Box 250, Westfield, 07091, and Times releases to Post Office Box 368, Scotch Plains, 07076, to meet the above requirements.

For events which happen the week-end prior to publication, press releases should reach the Editor by Monday of the week of publication at 10 a.m.

Obituaries will be taken until Tuesday at 5 p.m.

For events which are planned weeks or months in advance, we encourage submission of stories as early as possible prior to the event.

The above deadlines are meant to enable us to prepare your copy carefully.

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